PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 310

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
6 April—24 April 1998

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP, May 1997)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
Secretary of State for Education and Employment—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
President of the Board of Trade (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Cunningham, MP
Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, MP
Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. George Robertson, MP
Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson, MP
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, MP
Secretary of State for Social Security—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Marjorie Mowlam, MP
Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. Ron Davies, MP
Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Richard, QC
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Clark, MP
Minister of Transport—The Rt. Hon. Gavin Strang, MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—
Minister—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Cunningham, MP
Minister of State—Jeff Rooker, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Secretaries—
Elliot Morley, Esq, MP
The Lord Donoughue

Cabinet Office—
Minister Without Portfolio—Peter Mandelson, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, MP
Minister of State—
Minister for Film and Tourism—The Rt. Hon. Tom Clarke, CBE, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Mark Fisher, Esq, MP (Minister for Arts)
Tony Banks, Esq, MP (Minister for Sport)

Defence—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. George Robertson, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Defence Procurement—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Gilbert
Minister for the Armed Forces—Dr. John Reid, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—John Spellar, Esq, MP

Education and Employment—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, Esq, MP
Minister for School Standards—Stephen Byers, Esq, MP
The Baroness Blackstone
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Ms Estelle Morris, MP
Dr. Kim Howells, MP
Alan Howarth, Esq, CBE, MP

Environment, Transport and the Regions—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister of Transport—The Rt. Hon. Gavin Strang, MP
Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP
Minister for Local Government and Housing—Ms Hilary Armstrong, MP
Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning—Richard Caborn, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Nick Raynsford, Esq, MP (Minister for London and Construction)
Ms Glenda Jackson, MP (Minister for Transport in London)
The Baroness Hayman (Minister for Roads)
Ms Angela Eagle, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Derek Fatchett, Esq, MP
Tony Lloyd, Esq, MP
Doug Henderson, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean

Health—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Alan Milburn, Esq, MP
Minister for Public Health—Ms Tessa Jowell, MP
The Baroness Jay of Paddington
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Paul Boateng, Esq, MP

Home Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Alun Michael, Esq, MP
Ms Joyce Quin, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
George Howarth, Esq, MP
Mike O'Brien, Esq, MP
The Lord Williams of Mostyn

International Development—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—George Foulkes, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—
ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. John Morris, QC, MP
SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC

Lord Advocate's Department—
LORD ADVOCATE—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Hardie, QC
SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Colin Boyd, Esq, QC

Lord Chancellor's Department—
LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Geoffrey Hoon, Esq, MP

Northern Ireland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt. Hon. Marjorie Mowlam, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Paul Murphy, Esq, MP
Adam Ingram, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Dubs
Tony Worthington, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Geoffrey Robinson, Esq, MP

Privy Council Office—
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP
LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Richard, QC

Public Service, Office of—
CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Clark, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Peter Kilfoyle, Esq, MP

Scottish Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution—Henry McLeish, Esq, MP
Minister for Education and Industry—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Sewel, CBE
Sam Galbraith, Esq, MP
Calum Macdonald, Esq, MP

Social Security—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—
Minister for Welfare Reform—The Rt. Hon. Frank Field, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
John Denham, Esq, MP
Keith Bradley, Esq, MP
The Baroness Hollis of Heigham
Ms Joan Ruddock, MP

Trade and Industry—
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE (SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY)—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Trade—The Lord Clinton-Davis
Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe—The Lord Simon of Highbury, CBE
Ian McCartney, Esq, MP
Minister for Science, Energy and Industry—John Battle, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP (Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs)
Mrs. Barbara Roche, MP (Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry)

Treasury—
PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Geoffrey Robinson, Esq, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY—Ms Dawn Primarolo, MP
ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Mrs. Helen Liddell, MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE AND COMPETITIVENESS IN EUROPE—The Lord Simon of Highbury, CBE
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP
LORDS COMMISSIONERS—
Robert Ainsworth, Esq, MP
Graham Allen, Esq, MP
Jim Dowd, Esq, MP
John McFall, Esq, MP
Jon Owen Jones, Esq, MP
ASSISTANT WHIPS—
Clive Betts, Esq, MP
David Clelland, Esq, MP
Kevin Hughes, Esq, MP
David Jamieson, Esq, MP
Jane Kennedy, MP
Greg Pope, Esq, MP
Ms Bridget Prentice, MP

Welsh Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt. Hon. Ron Davies, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Peter Hain, Esq, MP
Win Griffiths, Esq, MP

Her Majesty's Household—
LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Camoys, KT, GCVO
LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD
MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Somerleyton, KCVO
TREASURER—George Mudie, Esq, MP
COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP
VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Janet Anderson, MP
CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Lord Carter
CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey
LORDS IN WAITING—The Lord Haskel, The Lord Whitty, The Lord Hoyle
BARONESSES IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton, The Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale

---

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Betty Boothroyd, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Michael J. Martin, Esq, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Michael Lord, Esq, MP

CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—
Mrs. Irene Adams, MP, Donald Anderson, Esq, MP, Peter Atkinson, Esq, MP, Joe Benton, Esq, MP, John Butterfill, Esq, MP, Dr. Michael Clark, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP, Roger Gale, Esq, MP, Jimmy Hood, Esq, MP, Barry Jones, Esq, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, John Maxton, Esq, MP, Mrs. Ray Michie, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Mrs. Marion Roe, MP, George Stevenson, Esq, MP, Bowen Wells, Esq, MP, Andrew Welsh, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Miss Ann Widdecombe, MP, Mrs. Ann Winterton, MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Lloyd, MP, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Gillian Shephard, MP, The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—M. R. Jack, PhD

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—
W. R. McKay, CB, (Chairman) (Clerk of the House of Commons), P. N. W. Jennings (Serjeant at Arms), Miss J. B. Tanfield (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—B. A. Wilson (Head of the Establishments Office)

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—N. Bevan, CB

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—J. S. Mason, CB, J. E. G. Vaux

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon D. C. Gray, TD, PhD

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Sir Gordon Downey, KCB

6 April 1998

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 310**

SEVENTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 6 April 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

British Forces (Germany)

1. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): If he will list the annual cost of British forces in Germany *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of offsetting arrangements. [36256]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): I estimate the total cost in the previous financial year of our armed forces based in Germany to be about £1.3 billion, the vast majority of which would arise wherever those forces were based. There is no offset agreement with Germany, although the armed forces benefit from barracks, some quarters and training areas, for which no charge is made.

Mr. Mitchell: I am sure my right hon. Friend would agree that that is still a substantial cost across the exchanges for a nation that has a trade deficit with the European Union. The forces were placed in Germany because of the Soviet threat, so the important question is this: as that threat no longer exists, as NATO is being enlarged to the Polish border and as the French are about to withdraw the great majority of their forces from Europe, is it any longer right to keep about one quarter of the British Army in Europe? Should we not bring it home?

Mr. Robertson: It will come as news to the French that they are about to withdraw their troops from Europe—perhaps my hon. Friend's obsession with the subject is getting the better of his grasp of the facts. As I said, the vast majority of the expenditure would have been required wherever the forces were based. Indeed, it is estimated that the additional costs of basing the Army in Germany last year were only about £150 million, in return for which we have leadership of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps, we maintain our substantial influence in NATO, we show solidarity with our allies and we improve the multinationality of training with our allies to face any threat, whether on the continent of Europe or elsewhere.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does not the disproportionately large cost of stationing a substantial part of, in particular, our Army in Germany distort Britain's defence posture as a whole? Would not at least part of that money be better spent on providing instruments for flexible intervention overseas, such as heavy lift transport aircraft?

Mr. Robertson: Unless the hon. Gentleman wants to bring all the troops back from Germany and disband the division that is currently located there, he makes no case. The 1st Armoured Division, which is based in Germany, is fully required and plays a positive role. Although there may be scope for changes in the size of our garrison in Germany, we believe that a substantial majority of our troops should stay there. If we brought back our troops from Germany but did not disband the organisations that were there, the British taxpayer would face substantial

costs in building new barracks. Moreover, many extra training facilities in this country would be needed, as that resource is currently at a severe premium.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I was, indeed, about to ask my right hon. Friend whether he agreed that, if we withdrew all our armed forces from Germany, we would have to find loads of money to build new barracks and other facilities. Would it not also be difficult to find enough training areas, of which, thanks to the previous Government, there is already a shortage?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a perceptive point. It is estimated—by the previous as well as the present Government—that it would cost about £2.5 billion in extra infrastructure and training ground to bring all our troops back from Germany. In addition, we would lose considerable influence in NATO and in the NATO tasks that British troops currently carry out. At a critical time in NATO's history, we would be breaking solidarity with the Americans who are still there, as well as with the Germans and all our other allies.

Malaysia

2. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): If he will make a statement about the state of defence relations with Malaysia. [36258]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): The United Kingdom's defence relations with Malaysia are very good. We are both members of the five-power defence arrangements and we also have important bilateral links.

Mr. Blunt: Was it wise of the Minister for Defence Procurement, when arriving in Malaysia to lead the British delegation to the Langkawi international maritime exhibition, to ignore the Malaysian Government representative waiting to greet him at the aircraft steps and spurn the travel arrangements made by the Malaysian police and the British high commission—whereby he was to travel to his accommodation in the high commissioner's Rolls-Royce with a Malaysian police escort—instead instructing his staff to arrange for a self-drive hire car? When he left the airport in his soft-top daffodil-yellow Fiat Punto, did the Malaysian police follow him through concern for his safety or through curiosity?

Is it right for the actions of a Minister of the Crown to have to be explained away to senior Malaysian Ministers, by senior figures in the very industry that he is supposed to represent, as those of a harmless eccentric?

Mr. Spellar: I was going to say that that was not the sort of question that one would have expected from a former adviser in the Ministry of Defence, but perhaps it was. We have had nine months of the strategic defence review. We are discussing the sale of defence equipment with the Malaysian Government, and we are about to sign a memorandum of arrangement on defence with them. We also provide considerable training for the Malaysian forces. Those are the issues that concern the Malaysian Government, with whom our relations are extremely good, especially after the enormously successful Asia-Europe summit, in which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government played an important role.

Aircraft Carriers

3. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If he will make a statement on fixed-wing aircraft carriers. [36259]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): The requirement for aircraft carriers has been considered as part of the strategic defence review but final decisions have yet to be taken.

Mr. Hoyle: I welcome that answer. Obviously, there is hope for a fixed-wing aircraft carrier, which would be a major shot in the arm for British shipbuilding and allow us to consider Eurofighter as a Fleet Air Arm variant, which would also bring benefit to British Aerospace.

Mr. Robertson: That would be considered further down the line, if a decision in principle is taken on aircraft carriers. I saw HMS Invincible coming into Portsmouth last week at the end of a tour in the Gulf and could not but feel proud at the role of the ship's crew and of the embarked Royal Air Force Harriers. They certainly played a substantial part in obliging Saddam Hussein to back down from his confrontation with the United Nations. The issue is deeply important involving not only the construction of aircraft carriers but the decision about what aircraft are to go on them.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): In order to learn proper lessons for the future, would it not be honest to acknowledge that we only just escaped the serious political and military embarrassment in the Gulf of a British aircraft carrier being unable to operate effectively in combat because of restrictions on the GR7 Harrier aircraft as a result of the climate?

Do not the lessons of the past six months teach us that, if Invincible, Illustrious and Ark Royal are to be replaced, there should be three new vessels? To ensure that they are fully effective, is it not necessary to ensure in turn that the aircraft carried are capable of operating in all climatic conditions?

Mr. Robertson: There is no embarrassment involved in looking carefully at what range of forces we might have in the Gulf at any point. At the end of last week, we simply announced an adjustment in our force levels in the Gulf. We are not letting our guard down for a moment. The danger and the threat have not gone away. We will not reduce our vigilance until we are absolutely satisfied that Saddam has provided the evidence to assure us that he has destroyed all his weapons of mass destruction.

The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the performance of some aircraft in the extreme heat of the Gulf. That is not new. The effectiveness of Harriers, like that of all other aircraft, declines in the Gulf summer; its ability to hover and land on carriers is affected by the extreme heat. We have made it clear that, by sending additional Tornados to Kuwait, we have in no way diminished the threat that we pose to Saddam if he continues his unnecessary confrontation with the United Nations.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Given that there are six shipbuilding yards in the UK capable of building vessels of more than 40,000 tonnes, some of which have state-of-the-art, high-technology, computer-assisted design for naval ships, as I discovered at Yarrow on the Clyde last Friday, will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to deny the persistent information that the Ministry of Defence would consider ordering aircraft carriers from Poland?

Mr. Robertson: That can only be a delusion held in the hon. Gentleman's mind. I am sure that the management of Yarrow cannot have been the source of that rumour. In the strategic defence review, we are examining the requirement that we might have for successors to our three Invincible-class carriers, and, if we decide to go down that route, what size they might be and what aircraft they would take. We are well aware of the shipbuilding and ship repair capability in this country, which is among the finest in the world.

Strategic Defence Review

4. **Sir George Young** (North-West Hampshire): What representations he has received from defence equipment manufacturers about the strategic defence review's implications for defence procurement. [36260]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): The strategic defence review has been characterised by its inclusive nature. Detailed work has been carried forward in conjunction with industry in seminars and working groups. I have received views from trade associations, through the National Defence Industries Council, which I chair, as well as contributions from individual companies.

Sir George Young: Will the Secretary of State apologise to this country's defence equipment manufacturers for his Government's appalling performance in processing export applications for licences? Is he aware that they are fighting with one hand tied behind their back? He inherited a figure of 97 per cent. of applications processed in 10 days. That figure has now slumped to some 60 per cent. Will the outcome of the SDR ensure that we revert to the figure that he inherited—and on delays, can he say when the SDR will be published?

Mr. Robertson: I am not going to apologise for anything. It takes the biscuit to hear Conservative Members, who are in opposition partly because of their record on arms export licences, complain about the time taken to scrutinise properly the supervision of arms sales. One reason why the right hon. Gentleman and I are in our respective positions is that the Scott report uncovered the way in which the previous Government gave arms licences willy-nilly. They paid a rich penalty for that.

On the most recent information available, I understand that the position on licences is improving, following the introduction of a much tighter arms licences regime: 52 per cent. of applications circulated to other Departments are now cleared within the 20-day target, compared with 48 per cent. last October. We will continue to take the greatest care possible to ensure that when we issue licences we are certain that the equipment will not be used for internal repression or external aggression. The public expect us to do precisely that.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): In respect of the strategic defence review, will my right hon. Friend ensure that his own enthusiasm for defence and the lobbying of defence equipment manufacturers do not result in extra costs for the British taxpayer?

Mr. Robertson: My enthusiasm for defence and the defence of this country is undiminished—indeed, such enthusiasm on the part of the Government as a whole was one of the reasons why my hon. Friend and I did so well at the last general election. However, I have an obligation to make sure that all the money spent on defence is spent properly and wisely. That point was made by my predecessor, Mr. Michael Portillo, who, in a magazine article at the end of last year, wrote:

"There is money to be saved in MOD."

I shall make sure that we use the budget that is there and the budget that was promised during the election for the maximum, most effective defence of this country. That is what we were elected to do and that is what we shall continue to do.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): In an earlier answer, the Secretary of State referred to biscuits; I hope that that is not all he intends to procure as a result of the defence review. On a matter that causes concern to defence manufacturers, will he assure the House that, when evaluating procurement, he will take into account technology and research into technological developments that needs to be carried out in this country?

Given the decline in the amount of money spent on research and development by the Ministry of Defence and the importance of our staying at the cutting edge of competitiveness in both defence and civil industries, the right hon. Gentleman has a tremendous responsibility to ensure that we do not lose out on a key stage of technological development simply because of cuts that his Department may be contemplating.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman highlights the fact that, under the previous Government, research expenditure was substantially reduced. I attacked that when in opposition, and I maintain my position in that respect. I am well aware that my Department is one in which research plays a big part in procuring the right equipment at the right price and at the right time. We shall ensure that that priority is maintained and built on.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does my right hon. Friend remember that it was the previous Government who arranged to put individual manufacturers at risk of prosecution and prison by cheating on the issue of arms permits? Will he make it clear to those involved in the defence industry in this country that the Government have no intention whatever of allowing little deals to be struck between Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry who turn a blind eye and Defence Ministers who have neither responsibility nor morals?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I assure her that our policy is designed to make sure

that, when the best products of the British defence industry are exported, they are not misused. We shall not turn a blind eye to the end use of that equipment.

My hon. Friend allows me, at this point, to make a fairly substantial announcement in connection with equipment sales. I am pleased to announce that the Government of Canada have today declared their intention, subject to final negotiations, to lease for eight years all four of the Upholder-class submarines currently berthed in Barrow. That is yet another of this Government's successes in selling something that the previous Government could not sell.

Canada has chosen to acquire the submarines via a lease with an option to purchase, as that is the most satisfactory solution for it. The arrangement is worth 610 million Canadian dollars to the United Kingdom. Work will be generated for various UK companies in reactivating the submarines and for GEC Marine at Barrow, which will provide technical and logistic support, including the provision of training to Canada. This is a piece of good news for this country, and I am sure that the Opposition will want to share in that good news for Britain.

Gulf War Syndrome

5. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What his current estimate is of the number of service men and ex-service men affected by Gulf war syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [36261]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): There is still no medical or scientific consensus about the nature of illnesses among Gulf veterans. Any statistical verification of such illnesses and the difference between Gulf veterans and the general population will have to await the outcome of the epidemiological studies. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, so far, 2,592 individuals have sought a referral to the Ministry's medical assessment programme.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that response and for the written replies that I have recently had from him. I know that he is taking a close interest in this subject, but will he ensure that the reviews and the investigation are dealt with urgently? In the meantime, will he confer with colleagues to ensure that the treatment available for those suffering from that syndrome is the same throughout the UK? At the moment, it is a lottery, as the treatment varies depending on where one lives. Will he pursue a policy that encourages more co-ordination?

Dr. Reid: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, we have already written to general practitioners throughout the United Kingdom telling them that any Gulf veteran who reports to them should not be dismissed out of hand, and referring them to the medical assessment programme. On the general seriousness with which the Government are treating the matter, even our worst enemies would admit that the effort put into it has been unparalleled in terms of our openness, our dialogue with the veterans, the resources allocated to the medical assessment programme, the continuation of the epidemiological studies already started, the inauguration of new studies into vaccines, and the publication of a huge amount of material on organophosphates and vaccines, to ensure that Gulf veterans are kept fully informed.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Is my hon. Friend in a position to publish the scientific studies on dead animals found in the Gulf? Would that have a bearing on those suffering from Gulf war illnesses?

Dr. Reid: I am in a position to do so. Earlier today, I published another paper, which details the outcome of the Ministry's review of information relating to dead animals in the Gulf. It had been requested by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), among others. On the basis of contemporary reports and eyewitness accounts, no evidence has been found to suggest that the presence of dead animals in the Gulf—the theatre of operations during the 1990-91 conflict—was related to the use of chemical or biological weapons. We remain of the view that there is no confirmed evidence of the use of chemical or biological weapons by Iraq in 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): May I congratulate the Minister on the way in which he and his staff are pushing ahead with what is a fiendishly complicated and difficult project? Does he agree that one of the difficulties of keeping Gulf war veterans accurately informed is that most of the studies, including those started under the previous Government, are very long term because of the complicated nature of the matters that they assess? When does he anticipate receiving the first detailed epidemiological survey relating to the Gulf war veterans?

Dr. Reid: As a general proposition, I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the wide range of the matters under consideration. Almost everyone to whom one speaks has his or her own theory about what may have caused a group of illnesses that may or may not be related.

It was anticipated that the outcome of the epidemiological studies would be available in a couple of years' time. However, difficulties are being encountered by the Medical Research Council and others in identifying exactly where every Gulf veteran is. We are doing what we can to help, but unfortunately, in our attempts to gain access to the addresses of all those who served in the Gulf, we are coming up against difficulties with the data protection legislation and the agencies implementing it. I urge members of Her Majesty's forces who served in the Gulf to write to the Ministry of Defence with their present address so that we can pass it on to those carrying out the epidemiological studies.

Smart Procurement Initiative

6. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): If he will make a statement on the Government's smart procurement initiative. [36262]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): Smart procurement is a ruthless examination, in conjunction with industry, of how value for money from our procurement programme can be improved to ensure faster, cheaper and better delivery

of our future requirements. Our improved business practices will be good news for the armed forces, for industry and for the taxpayer.

Mrs. Williams: Can my hon. Friend assure the House that, whatever the outcome, the strategic defence review will reform the way in which we procure equipment for our forces, and will eliminate as far as possible cost overruns, delays and waste, which were the hallmarks of the previous Tory Government?

Mr. Spellar: We are all very much aware of the reports from the National Audit Office on cost and time overruns. They have made embarrassing reading not only for Government but for industry as well. We aim to reform that process and get to our armed forces the right kit, at the right time, at the right price.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): The Government will be aware of the growing serious threat from long-range ballistic missile systems. Can the Minister confirm that the Government are seriously examining the possibility of setting up a national ballistic defence system?

Mr. Spellar: Yes, I can certainly assure the right hon. Gentleman that we are keeping this matter constantly under review and are undertaking the necessary studies to that effect.

RAF Menwith Hill

7. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What mechanism is in place to ensure that information gleaned from interception of communications by US forces at RAF Menwith Hill is not used in a way that is prejudicial to the interests of the UK. [36263]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): United Kingdom personnel are integrated into every level at RAF Menwith Hill, and we can therefore be confident that no activity prejudicial to United Kingdom interests is carried out there.

Mr. Baker: Can the Minister confirm the veracity or otherwise of the statement in the report prepared for the European Parliament, "Assessing the Technologies of Political Control", which suggests that all telephone, fax and e-mail communications within Europe are routinely monitored by United States forces based at RAF Menwith Hill? Given that such activity is expanding at a rate of knots and given that the cold war is over, it is reasonable to assume that it is done for non-military purposes. Can he confirm that the UK Government have access to all intercepts at RAF Menwith Hill? If he cannot, how could he give the assurance that he just gave?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on a report that I have never seen or, indeed, heard of—far less vouch for its veracity. RAF Menwith Hill is a communications facility, and there is total integration of United States and United Kingdom staff there. There is not only parliamentary accountability but accountability through the Intelligence and Security Committee, and not least from the hon. Gentleman. Of the thousands of questions that he has tabled since entering Parliament—at up to £600 a time—more than 20 on this matter have had my personal attention.

Defence Diversification

8. **Mr. John Hutton** (Barrow and Furness): What representations he has received on the Government's Green Paper on defence diversification. [36264]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): We have so far received three formal representations on the consultative Green Paper since its publication on 5 March. The consultation period runs until 8 May.

Mr. Hutton: I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today on the sale of Upholder submarines, which is welcome news for jobs in my constituency.

I welcome the Government's commitment to making their policy on defence diversification a success. Is it not a fact that the previous Government did absolutely nothing to facilitate defence diversification, and that that failure resulted in the failure of British companies to exploit such cutting-edge technology as liquid crystal displays, which were invented in the United Kingdom but exploited elsewhere? Was not that failure to act a total betrayal of defence workers throughout the country who lost their jobs under Tory Governments?

Mr. Spellar: I regret that I have to agree with my hon. Friend. Unfortunately, it was yet another case in which the previous Administration allowed dogma to override the interests of the industry. That is why our Green Paper on defence diversification has been widely welcomed not only by those who work in the industry but by many of the companies involved in it. It provides an excellent way forward for the defence community, and particularly for the huge amount of technology and scientific research that has been undertaken in our laboratories.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I thank the Minister for his courtesy in sending me a copy of the Green Paper at the time of its publication. Owing to a misunderstanding, I was critical of him at that time; let me put things right now.

Having said that, I cannot allow what the Minister has just said to go without challenge. What we have heard from him, and from his hon. Friend the Minister for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) is a travesty of the truth. Is he not aware that his own Green Paper encourages the Defence Evaluation Research Agency, which is based in my constituency, to continue doing what it has done so effectively up to now—sharing its technology with the civilian industry?

Does the Minister not realise that what really concerns industry is the future structure of DERA? I wonder whether he agrees with the chief executive of Messier-Dowty, Tony Edwards, who not only described DERA as a vital national asset but said:

"privatisation would . . . result in . . . further competition and distancing from industry."

Mr. Spellar: I am interested that the hon. Gentleman should take such an attitude to privatisation. It will cause some merriment among certain of his colleagues.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for the gracious apology that he made at the beginning of his question. Let me point out, however, that DERA is based not just in his constituency—although it has a substantial presence there—but in other constituencies throughout the country, including that of one of his Front-Bench colleagues. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want me to correct that.

It is undoubtedly true that DERA has been undertaking some useful work in spreading the technology it has, but DERA itself would acknowledge that that work could be much improved. We provide the mechanism for such improvement in the Green Paper, as well as a mechanism to give a much-needed boost to industry. I am thinking particularly of the exciting initiative allowing science parks to be attached to the laboratories. That is good news for constituencies across the country, and particularly good news for the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I hope that he will be more gracious about it next time he asks a question.

Gulf Presence

9. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What representations he has received about the deployment of British troops to the Persian gulf. [36265]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): My Department has received a significant amount of correspondence about the deployment of British forces in the Gulf. I have taken careful note of the variety of views expressed.

Helen Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he confirm that the temporary withdrawal of HMS Illustrious from the Gulf should not be seen by Saddam Hussein as a sign of any weakening of resolve on the part of either this country or the United Nations? To ram that message home, will my right hon. Friend tell us how he intends to balance the temporary removal of HMS Illustrious with other reinforcements in the gulf?

Mr. Robertson: I can assure my hon. Friend, the House and anyone who may care to listen that our resolve has not diminished one bit in the Gulf, and in our posture towards Saddam Hussein. The access that Saddam has now given to all the sensitive sites that he blocked earlier this year demonstrates the clear victory that was scored for diplomacy backed by the threat of force. We shall therefore be putting additional Tornado aircraft into the Ali al Salem base in Kuwait—with the kind agreement of the Kuwait Government—to "sharpen" our posture, and to remind Saddam Hussein of his obligation to deliver on what he himself agreed to when the Secretary-General of the United Nations went to Baghdad. We are reviewing the composition of our forces to ensure that we have the best mix for the job, and Saddam Hussein should interpret that in only one way—to mean that our vigilance remains exactly the same as it was, and that our resolve continues to be at the highest level.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Following the work of the UN inspectors, does the Secretary of State still believe that our British troops deployed in the Persian gulf are threatened by nuclear, biological and chemical warfare?

Mr. Robertson: The fair assessment at present is that, as long as the danger remains, the precautions that have been established must continue. We still want the troops in theatre to take advantage of the anti-anthrax vaccine that has been made available to them. Saddam has still not convinced the United Nations Special Commission, the United Nations or the rest of the world that he has destroyed all his capabilities for producing and using weapons of mass destruction, and that is precisely why we still have forces in the Gulf with those of our allies.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): May I press my right hon. Friend a little further on the question of British troops—and American troops, for that matter—in the Gulf? In the light of the successful inspection of the nine presidential sites by the UN last week, can my right hon. Friend give some idea of the criteria that he will use before British troops are withdrawn? It seems to some of his right hon. and hon. Friends that this is the right time for the withdrawal to begin.

Mr. Robertson: No. We are not yet satisfied that Saddam has provided clear indications that he will abide by the agreement that he signed, and we have not yet been provided with the evidence to be sure that he has destroyed his weapons of mass destruction. There would have to be a clear pattern of Iraqi compliance over time for our posture to be diminished in any way, because reducing our force posture might give him some indication that he could get away with more by confrontation. Last week, I had a long discussion with Ambassador Butler, the executive chairman of UNSCOM, on that subject. I assure my hon. Friend that the fate of the sanctions against Iraq and of Saddam himself lie in his own hands—all he has to do is comply and provide evidence of it; then the world position would rightly be different.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): We welcome the deployment of forces that the Secretary of State has announced. Will he say more about the progress that has been made since the agreement between Kofi Annan and Saddam Hussein? How many visits have been made, what banned materials were unearthed, and how much of those materials have been destroyed? Is continued progress being made to broaden support for the alliance in the Gulf, which is led by the United Kingdom and the United States?

Mr. Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman will know of the support for the posture that we rightly and properly took from the beginning in putting in place the force that made diplomacy work in the agreement signed with the Secretary-General. The right hon. Gentleman gave his support at that time, but since then the Secretary-General has clearly underlined the fact that, although diplomacy can achieve a lot, it can achieve a lot more if it is backed

by firmness and by force. That is why we joined the Americans in the Gulf, and why a large number of our allies then gave logistical and physical support.

The right hon. Gentleman will know that most of the sensitive sites inside Iraq have been inspected in the past couple of months. Ambassador Butler is satisfied that the inspections have taken place and that access has been given in a way that was denied until now. UNSCOM reports directly to the United Nations, so I am not in a position to give full details of what was or was not found. We are not yet satisfied that we have the evidence that Saddam has destroyed the weapons of mass destruction and the capability to produce them that he undoubtedly had in the past. Until then, our state of vigilance will be maintained.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I agree with my right hon. Friend's assessment of the situation in Iraq. There has been a lot of support from Ministers and Conservative Front Benchers for the campaign to indict Saddam as a war criminal for crimes against humanity and for crimes of genocide. It would take only one country to indict him. Why do we not take the lead?

Mr. Robertson: There is no forum yet established in which we could indict Saddam Hussein for war crimes. The proposed international criminal court, the establishment of which the Government firmly support, would have a remit only over the countries that agreed to abide by it. Sadly, I am pretty sure that Saddam Hussein's Iraq is unlikely to be a signatory, but we shall continue to support the Indict campaign.

I assure my hon. Friend that we have a number of strategies in relation to Iraq, based not only on the tough military posture of our troops who are giving great service to the country in the Gulf, but on the political front. We are especially concerned to ensure that the people of Iraq realise that our argument is not with them, but with the regime. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is making strenuous efforts to convene an humanitarian conference to ensure that we get through to the ordinary people of Iraq the help that the world community wants to direct to them.

Royal Air Force (Commemorations)

10. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What plans the Government have to commemorate in the UK the 80th anniversary of the Royal Air Force and the 50th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift. [36266]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I am delighted to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the Royal Air Force and to all those who support it. A number of events are planned to mark the 80th anniversary of its foundation and the 50th anniversary of the Berlin airlift.

Dr. Lewis: I am delighted to hear that the Government plan to recognise these events. Do the Government realise the intensity of pride that the British people take in such anniversaries? Will the Minister be a little more specific about the events that he has in mind? Events to mark these anniversaries have been carried out and are planned in my constituency. It would be a shame if more was taking place in one constituency than in the whole of Whitehall. Will the Minister consider the representations of the British Berlin Airlift Association, which wants the Royal Mail to issue a commemorative stamp to mark that crucial turning point in the war? That suggestion has so far been given an idle brush-off.

Mr. Spellar: I cannot accept that. I have had discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry, which, as the sponsoring Department, is discussing this matter with the Post Office. The Berlin airlift, which was authorised and instigated by that great Labour Foreign Secretary Ernie Bevin and of which we should rightly be proud, should be properly marked. A number of veterans will be going to Berlin, as will the Secretary of State. The 80th anniversary of the RAF is being marked, and both that anniversary and the airlift will be celebrated at the Fairford flying display in July. We tend to mark such anniversaries in blocks of 25 years, so although we shall have a number of events, they will not be on such a scale as for the 75th or the 100th anniversary.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): May I remind my hon. Friend that the RAF museum in my constituency recently celebrated its 25th anniversary? The museum has been working closely with the British Berlin Airlift Association and intends to mount exhibitions at Hendon and at its outstation at RAF Cosford to mark the anniversary of the Berlin airlift. Madam Speaker, you and any hon. Member who can find time in busy schedules to visit the museum to see what is planned will be more than welcome.

Mr. Spellar: Given my hon. Friend's remarks, I am sure that he will find that it pays to advertise. Those of us who recently visited the museum were impressed by the work that it is undertaking. We were pleased to support its lottery bid, and we believe that it has a great future in representing the proud and noble tradition of the Royal Air Force.

Territorial Army

11. **Mr. Keith Simpson** (Mid-Norfolk): What assessment he has made of the operational effectiveness of the Army if the Territorial Army's manpower were reduced to 40,000 personnel. [36267]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): The strategic defence review is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, looking at a range of options to improve the operational effectiveness of the Army, covering both the regular and reserve forces. No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Simpson: I am sure that the Ministers and hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that the role of the Territorial Army volunteer reserves is of fundamental importance not only for its link with society, but for the active support that it gives to the regular Army. Discussions are taking place within the Ministry of Defence on savings from the Territorial Army through manpower cuts because the regular Army is under such pressure. Does the Minister accept that, if the formed infantry and armoured regiments of the Territorial Army are reduced, perhaps to the level of merely a pool of

infantry and armour, recruitment will be drastically affected, and the effectiveness of our regular Army will suffer as a consequence?

Dr. Reid: I fully recognise not only the operational capability that the TA gives the British armed forces, but the regeneration, the assistance of cadets and the military-civil link.

If the hon. Gentleman starts from the standpoint that savings are to be made and that we must therefore make cuts, he repeats a mindset that is more indicative of the previous Government than of this one. We do not start with a target for cuts nor with a number and then justify it. We start with an analysis of the security and strategic environment in which we find ourselves and from that we derive our planning assumptions, from which we derive force configurations, including those for the Territorial Army.

Ms Christine Russell (City of Chester): Does the Minister agree that, in the light of changed world circumstances, it is right to re-examine the role of the TA? As I have a large TA presence in my constituency, I should like the Minister to at least consider giving the TA a more heavyweight role.

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for her helpful intervention. She is absolutely right. We should consider giving the Territorial Army a more useable, more relevant and, as she says, a more heavyweight role in that context. She is also right to say that the starting point should be the shaping of force structures according to our defence needs. She starts from the point of view of a strategic analysis, and that starting point is shared by all Labour Members and, I hope, many Opposition Members, but apparently not universally.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry: time is up. Time waits for no man or woman.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The President of the Council was asked—

Working Hours

35. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan** (Cardiff, West): What evidence the Government have submitted to the Modernisation Committee in its examination of the working hours of the House. [36291]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): The Government plan to submit a memorandum on the parliamentary calendar to the Modernisation Committee shortly after the Easter adjournment.

Mr. Morgan: I thank the President of the Council for that reply and assure her that she will get support from virtually all quarters of the House in her efforts to modernise the House and its working hours. The recent all-night sittings may or may not be wondrous examples of antediluvian, macho, arm-wrestling exercises, but they certainly do not provide high-class parliamentary legislative scrutiny.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for his support and for his remarks. I think that there is a great deal of support for the idea of improving House hours, but when it comes to working out the detail of the changes, there is not yet complete agreement.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): When the right hon. Lady submits evidence, will she give some idea of what the Government think is a proper allocation of time for Ministers to spend in the House? Is she aware that there is considerable concern in the House and outside about the rare appearances by the Prime Minister other than on Wednesdays and about the fact that he has voted in about 12 Divisions—5 per cent. of the Divisions that have been held since May of last year? He has treated the House with scant regard and has attended it far less than any of his predecessors this century. What does she intend to do about that?

Mrs. Taylor: I have no intention whatever of including such items in my memorandum, and I do not recognise the concerns that the hon. Gentleman says exist outside or, indeed, inside the House about the attendance of Ministers. The hon. Gentleman asked about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I should have thought that hon. Members in all parts of the House would realise that he is leading a Government who are making important decisions. At this time when many Ministers are involved in reaching settlements on delicate situations, such as the one in Northern Ireland, it is quite right that the Prime Minister should spend his time on such a matter.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I do not remember many Tory Prime Ministers attending the House much over the past 18 years. Does my right hon. Friend find it understandable that people outside cannot understand why we spend many hours in the evening and sometimes during the night, yet break up for a long period, sometimes for as much as three months or more during the summer? Would it not make much more sense to have a working arrangement under which the summer break was six weeks at most? Under such an arrangement, it would not be so necessary sometimes to work through the night.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure that the relationship between the length of the recess and the length of our individual sittings is quite as simple as my hon. Friend suggests. To perform our responsibilities of scrutiny, it is important that we strike a balance between sitting days, sitting weeks and the passage of legislation. We could examine recess dates, which I should like to make more family-friendly. I think that all hon. Members realise that, as soon as we consider changing the hours or weeks that the House sits, there will be knock-on consequences throughout the legislative process. We have to be aware of those consequences.

Conduct in the Chamber

36. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What representations she has received on the conclusions of the report on conduct in the Chamber of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons (HC 600). [36292]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): A number of people, within and outside the House, have commented favourably on the report.

Mr. Amess: Although I broadly welcome the report on conduct in the Chamber—particularly its reaffirmation that the Chamber should be the bedrock of our democracy—does the right hon. Lady share my concern that dress rehearsals seem to be occurring before Question Time? That was clearly demonstrated last Monday, when I myself was invited to such a dress rehearsal for Home Office questions. Does she also share my concern that many commentators are saying that—since 1 May, in the cause of modernisation—the Chamber seems to be slowly dying, as more is now reported first outside the House than to the House?

Mrs. Taylor: When their party is in government, hon. Members on both sides of the House attempt to get information before Question Time, to make their questions more relevant. There is nothing new in that. No, I do not think that the Chamber is dying. Presence in the Chamber is an important part of hon. Members' day, but it is not the whole of their commitment—not least because we now have more Committees, probably, than ever before. Hon. Members have to balance their time between the House, Committees and their constituencies.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend believe that it would be useful for the House to debate that report, which I think—without bias, as a member of the Committee—is a good one? Does she also agree that, although the report is specifically aimed at conduct in the Chamber, many of its comments are equally important and relevant to behaviour and procedures in Committee?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. He is well aware—not least because of his significant contributions to the Committee—of the wider ramifications of some of the points in the report. I am still hoping that it will be possible, between our return from the Easter recess and the Whitsun recess, to debate the Committee's more recent reports. I hope that that will be possible.

Oral Questions

37. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What representations she has received on the conclusions of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons in respect of oral questions (HC 600). [36293]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): Although I have received a number of favourable comments on the report generally, I have not received any comments specifically on oral questions.

Mr. Baker: Perhaps I can ask the President of the Council one now. As she knows, Opposition Members are all great fans of the Minister without Portfolio, and are delighted to have pushed up his Question Time from nothing, to five minutes, and then to 10 minutes. However, there is no slot in which to ask oral questions on his wider responsibilities. Is she aware that, in the previous Parliament, the then Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), had a slot to answer oral questions on his responsibilities for co-ordinating and presenting Government policy? Should not that model be followed by the Minister without Portfolio?

Mrs. Taylor: I have explained to the hon. Gentleman on several occasions that the Minister without Portfolio answers questions on topics for which he is the lead Minister. He is not the lead Minister on other topics; therefore, other Ministers are accountable to the House for those subjects. Current arrangements are working quite well.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): The right hon. Lady will know that I wrote to her to congratulate her on some of the measures that she has taken already in reforming the House. Does she agree that it is important that new Members should perhaps spend some time in the Chamber and in the House generally before they pass too many comments on how we should conduct our affairs in future?

Mrs. Taylor: I think that we not only have experience to impart to new Members but something to learn from them. We have found on the Modernisation Committee that, if we take a balance of views between new Members and more experienced Members, it is not always a matter of one group against another. We need a variety of experience, but also the freshness of thought that sometimes comes from new Members.

Divisions

38. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What is her policy regarding electronic voting in divisions. [36294]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): The Modernisation Committee has recently agreed to circulate a questionnaire to hon. Members seeking their views on the current voting system and a variety of possible alternatives.

Mr. Robathan: Did not a lot of the pressure to change the voting system come from new Members who were elected last year and imagined that they were coming into a cosy nine-to-five job, but discovered that they were expected to work rather harder? They were bemused to discover how hard they had to work. Have they not now discovered that, in the Division Lobby, they can catch the ear of Ministers—although not, of course, the ear of the Prime Minister, because he is never there—or, in our case, the ear of shadow Ministers, sadly, learn something and get the chance to lobby Ministers? Therefore, will the right hon. Lady please ensure that time-hallowed and extremely valued practices are not ditched just for the convenience of people who do not really understand?

Mrs. Taylor: I think that the hon. Gentleman's early comments were downright insulting to new Members, who did not come here with any illusions about having a cosy nine-to-five existence. If we can improve our voting procedures, we would be foolish not to look to do so, but he will be aware—because he will have read, I am sure, our earlier reports and comments—that Modernisation Committee members think that we should retain the principle of voting in or around the existing Division Lobby, even if we go towards some form of electronic voting. Having the ability to make contact with other hon. Members, be they Ministers or Back Benchers, is important. That is one element that I personally would like to see retained, as would most members of the Committee, but if we can improve the position by using some form of modern technology, that would benefit everyone.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for rising again. In Defence questions earlier this afternoon, I asked the Minister for the Armed Forces a specific question about a report called "Assessing the Technologies of Political Control", and his answer was that he was unaware of that report. On 26 January 1998, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) asked whether a statement could be made on exactly that report and its application to RAF Menwith Hill. The Minister said:

"I am aware of the report referred to by my hon. Friend".—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1998; Vol. 305, c. *33*.]

Will the Minister now withdraw the comment that he was unaware of the report and arrange to give me a substantive answer?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I will stand corrected, but, if the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) checks *Hansard*, he will find that my reply was that I would not verify a quotation from a report that I had not read—*[Interruption.]* We shall check *Hansard*. I am sure that I said, "that I have not read". *[Interruption.]* No: today's *Hansard*, which the hon. Gentleman might not know has not yet been prepared, but we can read it tomorrow. I am not in the habit of verifying quotations extracted from a document that I do not have in front of me and have not read.

Madam Speaker: I remind hon. Members that there are occasions when a Member does not necessarily approve of an answer that has been given by a Minister. That is not a point of order. If the answer is not approved of by the Member, of course, there is always the Order Paper to explore the question further. I am not responsible for the quality of answers that are given by Ministers.

Opposition Day

[10TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Trade Union Recognition

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.32 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I beg to move,

That this House urges the Government to define its policy on trade union recognition; and urges it to require the support of 50 per cent. of the total workforce, rather than 50 per cent. of those voting in ballots, to determine whether union recognition should be compulsory, given the Government's rejection of the Official Opposition's policy of leaving the law unchanged.

The motion is intentionally narrow. The Government amendment covers a wide range of important subjects, but they are not germane to the subject of trade union recognition, which is the subject that the Opposition seek to debate in the first part of our time today. The Government amendment deals with the minimum wage, the social chapter, works councils and the working time directive. Those are all essential and important issues, but they are different from the subject that we have put on the Order Paper.

The question this afternoon is simple and straightforward: should the law impose an obligation on employers to recognise trade unions, and, if so, when should that obligation arise? That is the question that the House is being invited to address. Our attitude to it is very clear.

Like the Confederation of British Industry, we are opposed to the compulsory recognition of trade unions. The provisions imposing compulsory recognition were key elements of the Employment Protection Act 1975. The Government like to argue the benefits of pilot schemes, but we conducted a pilot scheme on those proposals in the late 1970s, and it was a disaster. That is why we are opposed to reintroducing into law the principle of compulsory recognition of trade unions. We abolished such recognition in the Employment Act 1980, and that was one of the key elements in the long-term improvement in employment and industrial relations brought about during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, always with pleasure.

Mr. Winnick: On 25 January 1984, the Tory Government banned trade unions at Government communications headquarters. Does the Opposition spokesperson now agree that trade unions should be recognised at GCHQ, a change introduced by the Labour Government within weeks of coming to office, or does he take the view that the ban was right? If so, would a future Tory Government reintroduce the ban at GCHQ?

Mr. Dorrell: Again, Labour Members are keen to raise any subject other than that which we are seeking to put before the House. The question that the House is being

[Mr. Dorrell]

asked to consider is whether the law should impose a requirement for the compulsory recognition of trade unions.

Mr. Winnick: That does not answer my question.

Mr. Dorrell: I was going to go on to say that, of course, many employers voluntarily recognise trade unions as the representatives of their workers. There is widespread use of that practice in both the public and private sectors. For the purposes of this debate, the question is not whether trade union recognition is desirable or undesirable in all circumstances or in any particular set of circumstances, but whether the law should impose a requirement to recognise trade unions in a particular set of circumstances, against the wishes of the employer. That gives rise to several consequential questions.

If one is prepared to accept the principle that recognition should be imposed against the will of one of the parties to the agreement, the question arises—it is one that is causing untold grief within the Labour party and between Labour Front Benchers and the trade unions—what are the circumstances in which the obligation to recognise trade unions should operate? What are the implications if the principle is enshrined in law?

If recognition is compulsory, how should one treat the non-union staff of an employer who is required to recognise a particular trade union? What issues are covered by a compulsory recognition agreement? We have heard nothing from the Government about that. We have been told about the principle of compulsory recognition, but the Government have not set out the implications for trade unions and employers if a recognition agreement is imposed.

Mr. Winnick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman again in a moment.

What would happen if the parties to an imposed recognition agreement failed to agree after negotiation? Would the employer still be free to act as an employer must be free to act, to defend the interests of the firm and therefore the long-term interests of the people who work in it, or do the Government intend to impose a recognition agreement that gives a power of veto to trade union bosses over decisions that affect the viability of a firm? Is that the position that the Government are adopting? They have introduced the idea of compulsory recognition, but have refused to tell not only us but the employers and others who would have to operate the agreements what the implications would be.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The right hon. Gentleman is getting terribly worked up very early in his speech. In effect, what is on the table is nothing other than a version of what has existed in the United States since 1935, wholly supported and endorsed by Republican Congresses and Republican Presidents. If the right hon. Gentleman made the same speech in America, he would be laughed out of the House.

Mr. Dorrell: That is an interesting principle, which the hon. Gentleman might like to try out on the Prime Minister—that new Labour should sub-contract policy making to the Republican party in the American Congress. I look forward to hearing how he gets on. I am not sure that he will command the support of all his right hon. and hon. Friends on that.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, in June 1997, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment told reporters that the Government's White Paper on fairness at work would be published by the President of the Board of Trade by the autumn of that year? Ten months later, it has not appeared. Is that not because the Government are at war with themselves, with the modernisers on one side and the trade union lackeys and recipients of trade union sponsorship on the other?

Mr. Dorrell: As ever, my hon. Friend is one step ahead of my argument. I was about to raise that point.

Labour Members thought that they had resolved the issue and had an agreed policy that they could implement immediately after the general election. The Labour manifesto said:

"People should be free to join or not to join a trade union."

We have no difficulty with that. However, the manifesto continued:

"Where they do decide to join, and where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised."

The argument among Labour Members is over what those words mean—as we saw in the exchange last week between the Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Winnick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I will not, because I am dealing with the revealing exchange between the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his true hon. Friend, who is sitting on the Bench below the Gangway.

Mr. MacShane: We are all friends on the Labour Benches.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman can convince us of many things—perhaps even that we can sub-contract policy making to the Republican party—but he will never persuade us of that.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Bolsover in his place. At Prime Minister's questions last week, he said:

"When does the Prime Minister expect to conclude the talks with the Confederation of British Industry about the vexed problem of trade union recognition rights and voting by a simple majority? Is he aware that, the way that they are going on, they will probably take longer than the Northern Ireland peace agreement?"

That is an interesting parallel. The hon. Gentleman thinks that the disagreements in the Labour party are similar to those in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister's response was revealing.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What about the bit at the end?

Mr. Dorrell: I left that out. In the interest of peace on the Labour Benches, I am going on to give the Prime Minister's reply. He said:

"In the manifesto we stated that trade union recognition would be given if a majority of the relevant work force wanted it. We said that in government we would consult and negotiate on what that meant".—[*Official Report*, 1 April 1998; Vol. 309, c. 1254.]

That is an extraordinary proposition. We have the Prime Minister's word that the Labour party intended to consult and negotiate on the meaning of the words in the manifesto on which it was elected.

Some Labour Members and their supporters in the trade union movement thought that they knew what the words meant. Mr. John Edmonds said:

"This was very well discussed before the Government came into office. We worked out all the details. We are rather surprised that we are now a month before the White Paper is due to be published and apparently there are so many issues which haven't yet been settled. . . . It is a clear manifesto commitment that everybody understood."

Mr. Edmonds was in for a shock. He went on to say, more threateningly:

"I think the Labour Government will understand that if it didn't deliver that there would be some very difficult consequences within the party."

We are beginning to see the disagreements that give the lie to the proposition of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) about everyone being friends.

Several other issues are at stake over this matter, in the great Labour movement. The manifesto commitment is in truth new Labour in microcosm. At the election, the British people were presented with a coalition that combined, on the same side of the argument, the hon. Member for Bolsover and Mr. Rupert Murdoch. It will not come as a surprise either to Mr. Murdoch or to the hon. Gentleman that that coalition, which defied gravity, is beginning to crumble a little at the edges.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): Does not that coalition simply show just how unpopular the right hon. Gentleman's party was?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman will need to reflect on the fact that it shows how unairworthy the vessel on which he is flying will turn out to be. He is in the House, but how long will he stay here? As this Parliament progresses, that question will increasingly dominate his thinking and that of many of his hon. Friends.

The Prime Minister knows that the press know that the coalition that he put together, which includes the hon. Member for Bolsover and Mr. Rupert Murdoch, is, to put it no stronger, a trifle suspect. He knows that the question of trade union recognition throws the spotlight on one of new Labour's key weaknesses. That is of course why, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) pointed out, the implementation of the pledge in the doublespeak of the manifesto has been delayed.

Mr. John Monks, of the Trades Union Congress, sought to persuade the Prime Minister immediately after the general election that the commitment was, in the words of Mr. John Edmonds, clear; everybody knew what it meant. He asked why it should not be put into the National Minimum Wage Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham could then have talked about it all night.

Mr. Monks said that there was an opportunity to put the commitment into a piece of legislation and carry it through, as everybody knew what it meant. The Prime Minister was a little more cautious; he ordered delay. As he had got the hon. Member for Bolsover and Mr. Murdoch on the same side of the argument, he told Mr. Monks to go away and get the TUC on the same side of the argument. That was always, of course, an impossible task.

The CBI has been crystal clear on the issue. Mr. Adair Turner said:

"The CBI would quite clearly prefer not to have legislation creating a statutory requirement for union recognition . . . We don't see the need for change and we would prefer to leave the legal framework as is."

We on the Conservative Benches whole-heartedly agree with those words.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Opposition motion exactly reflects the CBI's position? Does he recall that, when his Government proposed that all those who did not vote in ballots for industrial action should be counted as votes against, the CBI opposed that as nonsense?

Mr. Dorrell: That is another example of Labour Members being intent on talking about every subject other than the one on which they are currently disagreeing. I quite understand the hon. Lady's self-preservation instinct; it is a great deal easier to talk about issues on which they are all on the same side. The motion requires Labour Members to address an issue that is a subject of argument in the Government. The Labour party was elected without having resolved the meaning of the words in its manifesto.

Mr. Turner went on to say that, if we must have compulsory recognition, which is an undesirable state of affairs, three key issues have to be addressed. I shall touch on two of them briefly before referring to the third, which is the key and by far the most important.

First, I wish to refer to the position of those who are not members of trade unions, when there is a compulsory recognition agreement. Of those people, Mr. Turner says:

"there should be a right for individuals working in units covered by collective bargaining agreements to make separate individual contracts with their employers if they so wish."

That must be right. We cannot have a compulsory recognition agreement that claims to subsume the rights of those who choose not to be a member of a trade union. The rights of non-union members are critical and must be addressed.

Secondly, I refer to small firms. Mr. Turner says:

"At the small company level, entrepreneurs should simply be able to say—this is the style by which I want us to work within this company—bargaining based or not, consultative or directed in style—and to attract to that company people who are happy to work in that style."

Once again, that is a clear enunciation of an important principle.

We then move to the third and critical question. What majority is required? If we are to have compulsory recognition, what support does the trade union have to show among the work force of the particular part of the company that it claims to represent? That question—raised by the hon. Member for Bolsover with the Prime

[Mr. Dorrell]

Minister—is in danger of tearing the Labour party apart. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Labour Members say that is rubbish. We shall come back to that.

This is a key issue of principle. Who can claim the right to speak for, and negotiate and do deals on behalf of, a group of workers? The CBI says—and we agree—that, if we must have compulsory recognition, a trade union must be able to show the support of at least 50 per cent. of those on whose behalf it claims to speak before it can claim that right. That is a simple proposition.

The trade unions and the hon. Member for Bolsover argue, on the contrary, that, if there is a 20 per cent. vote and 10.1 per cent. of the work force vote for recognition, that 10.1 per cent. can impose their will on 89.9 per cent. of the employees of the company. That is the principle that the hon. Member for Bolsover and the trade unions stand for. The Prime Minister knows which side is right—there is no argument about which side his instincts are on. The question is whether he can carry his party with him.

This is an acid test of whether new Labour is any different from the Labour party of nearly 30 years ago. Then, it was not the President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who was presenting a paper, but another lady, Baroness Castle, who presented "In Place of Strife" in 1969. Is this to be "In Place of Strife, Volume 2"?

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I do not understand the right hon. Gentleman's view of legitimacy. Why is it somehow not legitimate for less than 50 per cent. to speak on behalf of the whole, when Governments may be elected by 43 per cent. of the vote and when directors are often elected by a very small number of the shareholders voting, yet speak on behalf of the company?

Mr. Dorrell: That is a question one dreams of being asked. The hon. Gentleman asks what difference there is between an election and the claim of a trade union to speak on behalf of a group of workers. They are completely different propositions. The claim of a trade union to speak on behalf of a group of workers should be based, as a minimum, on commanding the support of the majority of the group of workers on whose behalf the union claims to speak.

This is not just a matter of principle—trade union bosses understand clearly that it is a matter of straight power politics. Mr. Bill Morris understands that. As long ago as 1991, he was saying:

"The unions' big problem today is not maintaining the closed shop"—

that is the old argument—

"it's getting recognition. If I have to choose between a closed shop and statutory recognition, I'll choose statutory recognition."

Mr. Bill Morris sees clearly where the interests of his union as an organisation rest. That is why the trade union movement has vacated the field on the subject of the closed shop, recognising that compulsory statutory recognition is more important. That is what the argument is about, and why Mr. Morris is making it crystal clear that it is an issue on which the Transport and General Workers Union intends to stand and fight.

I can quote more up-to-date words from Mr. Morris, to reinforce that principle:

"This is a defining issue for trade unionists. There is simply no room for compromise . . . It's a straightforward choice: either the Government supports the CBI position or the TUC position."

Mr. Morris says that it is a straightforward choice, with no room for compromise.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was because of the importance of the issue that so many trade unions made available millions of pounds, not least in kind, through providing professional full-time agents, computers and cars in marginal seats at the general election? Now the trade unions are demanding their payback for what they did last year.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right, and I shall offer some reflections on that linkage in a moment. First, I must dwell on the strength of feeling attached to the principle within the trade union movement. It is not only Mr. Morris who sees how important it is from the unions' point of view. Roger Lyons, the general secretary of the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union has said that the issue could

"make the split on the lone-parent benefits look like a vicars' tea party".

He understands the important issues to be decided in politics today.

Mr. John Monks has said:

"If this goes . . . wrong . . . it will be a decisive moment."

Furthermore, an unnamed senior figure in the Labour party—someone with good contacts at the *New Statesman*, so we can draw up an acute short list of who that might be—has said:

"Someone, somewhere is selling out".

Those are the words being used within the Labour party to describe the current debate about what the words in the Labour manifesto mean.

The principles are all clear enough. Labour Members have a problem. The hon. Member for Bolsover does not have one, and we heard last week what he thinks about these issues. I have brought my pager, too and I use it as often as he does—

Mr. Skinner *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dorrell: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman borrowed it. His right hon. and hon. Friends on the Labour Benches have a problem, however. They are in trouble in this debate, because they do not know which way Tony is going. They are sitting like startled rabbits caught in the headlights. They do not know which way to leap, because they have not yet heard on the pager which way the new Labour version is going.

We know which way the Prime Minister would like to go, and there is no serious secret about that—

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Both ways.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, both ways at once, but even for the Prime Minister, that is impossible. His instincts are clear, as we heard from the Lord Chancellor, who is always sent in to bat on an unpopular cause, to see where the bullets

are coming from. Before the election, the Lord Chancellor made it clear that the Labour party should adopt the CBI position, so that is one piece of evidence about where the Prime Minister is coming from.

The House will remember that the Minister for School Standards—another licensed Blairite and another tin hat shot up occasionally above the barricades to see what is coming—held a famous dinner party in Blackpool—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): It is a good place for a conference.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, that was the last visit by the people's party to the people's resort—perhaps that is why the Labour party is not going back to Blackpool.

The Minister for School Standards speculated with a group of journalists about how a new Labour Government might provoke a crisis—*[Interruption.]* I see Labour Members nodding; they recognise the argument. The Minister almost salivated over his dinner at the prospect of the new Labour Government provoking a crisis in their relationship with the old Labour trade unions, giving new Labour the opportunity to break the trade union link. We know where the Prime Minister's instincts—his private, deepest thoughts—lie. Probably, he sometimes allows himself to dream what *The Sun* headline would be if Labour made it clear that it was dumping the trade unions and going with the CBI.

As the Prime Minister steels himself in the still watches of the night to take the decision, other voices, of which my hon. Friends have reminded us, will whisper in his ear, "Listen, Tony. Labour has an £8 million overdraft, and Unison, the TGWU and the GMB have all cut their contributions." The Prime Minister will also be reminded that the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union has withheld £250,000. Sources at the union say that it wants to see the contents of "Fairness at Work" before it gives the money. That is the first cautionary note sounding in the Prime Minister's ear.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): What advice would the right hon. Gentleman give to a constituent who came to his surgery on a Saturday asking about recognition? Let us suppose that the constituent said, "I'm having trouble with my employer at the local factory. We have tried negotiating, but the employer does not want to talk—we seem to have almost no rights." What would he say to that constituent, who had come to him for protection?

Mr. Dorrell: I would say, first, that he could talk to his employer and, secondly, that he did not need to be a member of a recognised trade union to talk to the employer. I would also tell him that I did not believe that his trade union had any right to speak on behalf of other employees at the firm unless it could show that it had the majority support of the other employees—that is the principle that the House is being asked to discuss.

I was listing the cautionary voices that will whisper in the Prime Minister's ear, among which, apparently, will be that of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), which will advocate the proposition that we return to the 1970s—that is his slogan—and compulsory recognition.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I believe in fair play.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman bellows, "Fair pay." [HON. MEMBERS: "Fair play."] How can he seriously argue for fair pay when, in the 1970s, his prescription led to high unemployment and industrial failure, and Britain was the lame duck of Europe?

Although the Prime Minister's instincts may point in one direction, he has to consider his £8 million overdraft and whether the union dues will keep coming. He must remember the opposition that the trade unions are threatening to mount if he follows his, and Mr. Murdoch's, instincts. Another senior source in the union to which the hon. Member for Workington belongs—the TGWU—said:

"If the white paper turns out to be as bad as we fear, the movement will need to decide how to build opposition to it inside and outside Parliament."

The Prime Minister knows that this is the issue that can light the touch-paper to opposition in the trade union movement and on the Government Back Benches. That is why he is handling it with kid gloves.

The Prime Minister has an even more serious threat in his mind. Barely an edition of the newspapers comes out without our learning of another member of the Cabinet lining up with the hon. Member for Bolsover.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): They are not here.

Mr. Dorrell: Their instinct for self-preservation is sufficiently developed to ensure that they are absent. The President of the Board of Trade has to be here only through the bad luck of our discussing a matter relating to her Department.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment makes it clear privately, in a non-attributable way, that he is on the unions' side. Goodness knows why, but the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is on the list; perhaps he wants to safeguard his position. The Secretary of State for Health is there, presumably representing all his old friends in the London Labour party. The Secretary of State for Wales is always on such lists. The Deputy Prime Minister is keeping his head down, but his name is there.

The one the Prime Minister really has his eye on is his next-door neighbour, who is going around burnishing his links with the trade unions. Where has the Chancellor of the Exchequer been on the subject? He has been off to a great shindig with the Transport and General Workers Union, at its 75th anniversary party, no less.

The brother in arms of new Labour said:

"If the trade union movement didn't exist today, it would have to be created."

He certainly did not get that off the No. 10 pager. The Chancellor continued:

"Let us remember that the trade union movement was born against the odds, it grew against the odds, it developed its strength against the odds and it will succeed against all odds."

The Chancellor praised the Transport and General Workers Union's former leader, Mr. Jack Jones; not too many new Labour spokesmen volunteer support for him. Perhaps most tellingly of all, he let slip the thought that he was "on their side". He is busy building his position.

One need not know much Labour party history to have a strong sense of deja vu. In 1969, Barbara Castle knew what had to be done, and the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was right behind her. It was always dangerous to be out in front of Harold Wilson. The Chancellor of the

[Mr. Dorrell]

day was busy burnishing his contacts with the trade unions, and Harold Wilson performed the manoeuvre for which he is best remembered: the strategic scuttle.

Nearly 30 years on, the Prime Minister faces the same test: will he face down today's trade union bosses and make a principled stand, or is he in reality Harold Wilson mark 2? To govern is to choose, and the Prime Minister has now to choose.

4.7 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government for acting quickly and effectively to redress the damaging culture of low pay, job insecurity and the sweatshop economy inherited from the previous Government by adopting a partnership approach to set decent minimum standards for all workers; notes that good standards at work are essential for competitiveness and business success and that the Government has, as part of its strategy for ensuring decent minimum standards and labour market flexibility, involved employers' and workers' representatives on the Low Pay Commission and in discussions on trade union recognition, and in addition has restored union rights at GCHQ, signed the European Social Chapter and made rapid progress on the National Minimum Wage Bill; and further notes that the Government is also committed, as part of that strategy, which enjoys wide support, to implementing the Directives on Working Time, Young Workers, European Works Councils and Part-Time Work, and to fulfilling the Government's commitment to enable workers to enjoy union recognition where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them."

That was a tour de force on the only subject that ever unites the Tory rabble: a fundamental attack on employment rights in the workplace.

The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) even had the cheek and temerity to complain within 30 seconds that the Government had tabled an amendment to prompt discussion on other issues relating to employment rights, such as the minimum wage, the working time directive, part-time rights and insecurity. He was a member of a Government who created complete insecurity for the work force and undermined workers through low pay. They supported only those employers who wanted to implement poor employment practice, and undermined those who wanted to apply good employment practice.

We have witnessed the right hon. Gentleman's desperate last attempt to stay in the shadow Cabinet. I noticed at the weekend, under the headline, "Barbie's Hero", that he is for the chop in the next reshuffle and is described as the burnt-out education spokesperson. After that speech, I think that we have a burnt-out shadow Cabinet and a burnt-out Opposition who have learnt nothing from their defeat last May.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is here. He went on unofficial strike against his own Cabinet; he walked out on his Prime Minister. The Prime Minister decided to look for recognition and went for a recognition ballot. The right hon. Member for Wokingham lost it and went around Britain with his Euro-sceptics as flying pickets against every Conservative who stood at the last general election. He is an expert on poor industrial relations in his party.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman wants to calm down. He has a long evening ahead of him. I am sure that he will have an opportunity to contribute at some stage.

The right hon. Member for Charnwood raised the question of Labour and trade union funding. What a cheek from a party which refuses to give back the money stolen by Asil Nadir. What about the Greek millionaires found guilty of corruption in their country? Did the Tories give that money back? The answer is no. To top it all, they took money from Hong Kong drug barons and still refuse to pay it back. The Labour party needs no lessons from Conservatives about the openness of its funding.

I am surprised that the right hon. Member chose this subject. Trade union recognition is part of the broader question of the way in which people are treated at work. It is part of partnership at work, part of a fairness culture. It is about whether people at work should have fundamental and democratically exercised rights in the workplace.

Over the past few years, we have seen all too clearly that the Conservatives are against decent, fair treatment of workers and the exercise of fundamental, democratic rights. They are against fair pay and against people having the protection of a union if they want it. They also campaigned against minimum standards that workers throughout the rest of Europe enjoy as a matter of course. They are against so much that one might think that they were not in favour of anything.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not interesting that, when I asked the Opposition spokesperson whether the Conservatives remained committed to a ban on trade union membership at GCHQ, he refused to give an answer? Was not the banning of the trade unions there disgraceful? Is it not good that, within weeks of the election of a Labour Government, we carried out our promise and lifted that bad ban?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right. As the Conservative Government left Downing street, trade unions were allowed back into GCHQ. I am proud of that decision.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): In the light of the Minister's apparent condemnation of Conservative industrial relations policies since 1979, will he say which of the six major Acts passed since then he proposes to reverse?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman displays something else: always living in the past. The set of proposals that this Government will introduce is about workers living in the present, about dealing with the fact that the previous Government left us in an horrendous position of low pay, insecurity in the workplace and individuals being sacked at the whim of employers. We intend to deal with that in no uncertain terms.

The right hon. Member for Charnwood also suggested that the Opposition may change their view on some policy areas. I shall deal with that later. The truth is that the

Conservative Government wanted to deliver a sweatshop economy for Britain. The Tories always supported bad employers against good employers. They drove down pay and conditions and so undercut good employment practice. Their Government was always on the side of poor employment practice. Never once did they stand up for decent employment standards, employment rights or, in a market position, for good employers investing in their employees, in education, training and good employment standards.

The Conservative Government always undercut the good employer by supporting the Arthur Daleys of this world. They even abolished wages councils, which provided a minimum of protection against the exploitation of some of our most vulnerable workers. They indulged in a frenzy of privatisation and compulsive competitive tendering, as a result of which thousands of workers lost their job or had their pay cut and their hours increased.

The Conservatives did all that in the name of deregulation, claiming that those measures were necessary to give employers the opportunity to create jobs, but they presided over the highest level of unemployment since the 1920s. Even on their own fiddled figures, unemployment rose to more than 3 million. I remember a Prime Minister saying that that was

"a price well worth paying."

At the general election, the voters did not think so, and elected a Labour Government to make a difference for millions of people in the workplace. I am astonished that a party with such an appalling record should seek to draw attention to that record, by contrasting it with the positive, fair and even-handed action of the Labour Government.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Is it not true that the previous Government never called the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress together to discuss employment rights? Does my hon. Friend remember the speech by Baroness Thatcher, in which she declared that trade unions were the enemy within?

Mr. McCartney: The whole raison d'etre of the Conservative party is opposition to partnership in the workplace. Other than the schoolboy politics it contained, the whole basis of the speech by the right hon. Member for Charnwood was opposition to partnership, for the sake of opposition. At no stage have the Conservatives committed themselves to the principle of partnership in the workplace; they believe solely in the principle of hire and fire—the employer's capacity to do anything whatever to the employee in the workplace. That is something the British people rejected by voting against the insecurity and fear of exploitation ushered in by the previous Government's policies. We are going to make a difference.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman is talking about history again, but does he remember the winter of 1978-79? I know that he is very young, but does he remember that winter of discontent? Was that the sort of partnership between employers, employees and Government of which he speaks?

Mr. McCartney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for saying that I am very young—as the youngest grandfather in the House of Commons, I take his remark as a great compliment. However, the hon. Gentleman has again proved my point—the Conservatives live in the past, three decades ago; they take no account of the changes that have taken place in the workplace.

The Labour Government were elected, in large measure, to put an end to unfair and shabby treatment of working people. We have already taken great strides towards restoring a fair balance to the world of work. We have a clear, detailed and popular strategy for promoting fairness at work; we have a strategy for promoting partnership and mutual trust; we have a strategy for raising competitiveness by ensuring that workers are well motivated and productive. Ours is an inclusive policy: we want those who want work to be able to get work. The challenge in the workplace is ensuring that Britain is a more competitive and fairer place in which to live and work.

In part, that is a matter of establishing a fair balance: to have a framework of law that guarantees decent minimum standards, while maintaining necessary labour market flexibility. We need the force of the law to deal with the worst employers—those who pay poverty wages, who force their employees to work excessive hours and who make their workers clock off when business is slack and clock back on when it picks up. Those unscrupulous employers not only mistreat their employees but undermine their competitors who are trying to provide decent terms and conditions. We need tough laws to deal with cowboy employers. We need to protect employees and good employers from unfair competition.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): As we have already heard one or two blasts from the past, would it surprise my hon. Friend to learn that the infamous anti-trade unionist George Ward is chairman of Hendon Conservative association? He has not lost his anti-democratic principles, and that association has, recently been suspended from the national association, on the ground that Mr. Ward, among others, has been trying to infiltrate the Conservative association with his friends and relatives and employees of Grunwick?

Mr. McCartney: That is another sorry example of infiltration into the Tory party. We have seen Asil Nadir, Greek shipping magnates and drug barons do it, and the tragedy is that the Conservatives take no steps against that sort of thing. Consequently, the British public have largely rejected the Conservative party wherever it still tries to exist.

The truth is that we need to go beyond the law, and change the climate in our workplaces from one of confrontation to one of partnership. Employers and workers have many common interests. They both need their organisations to succeed, to generate profits and well-paid jobs. Employers need a skilled, motivated work force. Workers want interesting, secure jobs where their talents are properly used and their contribution respected. That already happens in the best workplaces, but in too

[Mr. McCartney]

many there is no mutual trust. The values of greed and lack of respect for workers' dignity, preached by the previous Government, are still far too prevalent.

Mr. Collins: While the hon. Gentleman is on the subject of unfairness at work and bad employers, will he tell us who was right at Wapping: Rupert Murdoch or the print unions?

Mr. McCartney: That is another pathetic question. This Government were elected on the principle of establishing recognition in the workplace. The discussions that are taking place are about how, not whether, that will operate.

The Government are setting themselves the long-term task of improving the climate at work, building trust and partnership. It is not just about union recognition, although that is an important and familiar form of partnership in the British industrial tradition. It is about rights and respect, and about involvement in lifelong learning for every worker, including the two thirds who are not union members.

The White Paper on fairness at work, which we shall publish in the first part of this year, will set out our policy on building partnership and how we intend to pursue it. All the employment measures that we have taken and will take are based on a partnership approach, which is the best way to improve competitiveness.

A few organisations have long treated employees as partners and equals. A few, but far too few, have share option schemes for all employees, not just for directors. There are encouraging signs that more firms are moving in the right direction. For example, proposals were recently announced for a partnership between Tesco and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, which will give employees better representation through the union, new consultation structures and improved communications.

Another example is the partnership-based approach adopted by Transco, part of the former British Gas. Its approach is to "open the books" to all employees so that they know exactly where the company's financial resources are invested. It is also involving the unions in a partnership council for business improvement. There have been many other examples in the first year of this Government. Employers are looking at a new culture of partnership in the workplace.

Yesterday, I was pleased to see reports of an agreement between the Alfred Marks employment agency and the Communication Workers Union, which will mean that thousands of temporary workers at BT will at last be covered by the union for negotiating purposes.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way twice to me. He says that the debate is not just about union recognition, but his speech so far is about anything but union recognition. Will he now tell us whether he supports the CBI or the TUC position?

Mr. McCartney: That is another silly question. The Government have made it absolutely clear that, in the first part of this year, we shall publish a White Paper that will include matters surrounding union recognition. Following the White Paper and consultation, we shall introduce a legislative programme. I do not intend to negotiate with the hon. Gentleman, who is totally opposed to recognition in the workplace.

Mr. Dorrell: If the Minister will not answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), will he at least, as it is the subject for debate, suggest to the House some of the considerations that others should take into account in seeking to answer that question?

Mr. McCartney: The question will be answered when the White Paper is published, in view of the consultation that will be carried out. This is the first Government in 18 years who have opened up any consultation and dialogue with employers about partnership in the workplace. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman, who is also an employer, will say whether the companies of which he is a director recognise trade unions. I note that he is not coming to the Dispatch Box, so the answer would appear to be that he does not recognise trade unions.

As a first and vital step, the Government have begun a dialogue with employers' and workers' organisations, seeking their views and involving them in the formulation of policy. Within 90 days of the election, we set up the independent Low Pay Commission to advise us on the level of a national minimum wage. The commission includes representatives of employers and workers, as well as independent members. It has carried out the most extensive consultation on low pay with employers and employees ever seen in this country.

We then invited the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress to hold discussions on the subject of today's debate—trade union recognition. They did so, and published a joint statement showing considerable and welcome agreement. They agreed that priority should be given to voluntary agreements, with the law as the last resort. They agreed that the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service should have an opportunity to conciliate before the statute procedure is invoked. They agreed that there should be a procedure for derecognition. They agreed that, once an application for recognition or derecognition has been decided, there should be no new application for at least three years. They agreed that unions should be able to make joint applications. They agreed on how the ballot should be organised and conducted, though not on what majority should be required. They agreed that non-union channels of representation can continue alongside recognition.

I could go on listing the areas of full and partial agreement. Suffice it to say that there is already more about which the CBI and TUC agree than disagree. They have continued talking to us, and I hope that they can find yet more agreement.

Involving social partners is a completely different approach. The previous Government shunned trade unions, despite the fact that they represent millions of workers—still a third of the work force, despite the efforts of the previous Government to drive down trade union membership. At times, it seemed as though the previous Government shunned employers' organisations, too. It was no surprise when, in November 1996, the then Government's proposals for yet further restrictions on trade union activities were heavily criticised by, among others, the CBI and the Institute of Directors.

In contrast, we see employers and unions as our allies. We are working with them, involving them in all our policies that affect the workplace. We showed the way in the first few days after the election, by ending the ban on trade unions at GCHQ, restoring the basic right of workers to join a union of their choice—something the previous Government obstinately refused to do, despite national and international criticism.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): As I understand it, the Government do not intend to change legislation with regard to balloting trade unions on industrial action, or to change the law on secondary picketing, and they do not intend to change other industrial legislation that was passed by the previous Government. All we are saying is that it is a requirement of our Government to give people in the workplace the legal right to join a trade union.

Is my hon. Friend aware that giving people the right to join a trade union is not simply giving them the right to take industrial action? It is also to give them the collective protection that the trade union offers people in the workplace.

Mr. McCartney: I think that we are giving more than that. We want to ensure that people in the workplace have the opportunity to exercise their statutory rights, whether or not they are in a trade union. The Government's whole approach is to give people in the workplace standards and minimum rights, whether they are part time or full time, and we shall continue to do so in conjunction and in co-operation with employers and trade unions. Where trade unions are in the workplace and employees want to be represented by them, that should also be a right. That is why the Government have put forward their proposals, which were accepted at the general election.

Involving social partners is a completely different approach. During the general election, Conservatives continued their opposition to partnership in the workplace, but we as a party are prepared not only to reject that proposal but to support, in intellectual and practical terms, various measures to promote partnership in the workplace. We introduced the National Minimum Wage Bill to put an end to poverty pay and to curb cowboy employers who drive down standards and undercut decent employers. The Tories failed in an attempt to filibuster in Committee and on the Floor of the House, and the Bill has now completed its stages in the House and gone to another place.

Perhaps the right hon. Member for Charnwood would like to tell us, and the working people of this country, what he and his hon. Friends would do in the unlikely event that they were ever again on the Government Benches? Would they repeal the national minimum wage and allow wages to fall to the levels that we now see, with security guards and hairdressers earning £2 an hour or less? Does he support his leader, who has clearly suggested that, at the next election, the Tories will not oppose a national minimum wage. Is that correct?

Mr. Boswell: When the Minister asks us, as he has in the past, about our attitude to the national minimum wage—and, indeed, to the specific issue that we are discussing—would it not be helpful, in the light of our motion, if he told us what the Government's proposals are? That is what we are about today.

Mr. McCartney: I have been setting out the Government's position on partnership and on minimum standards in the workplace since the beginning of my speech.

It is clear that the right hon. Member for Charnwood will not follow his leader, who, not a week ago, told *The Observer* that, at the next election, the Conservatives would consider not opposing the national minimum wage. We now see a further split in the Conservative party. It is clear that "Vote Tory in the next election" means "Vote for wage cuts".

We are about to implement the working time and young workers directives. The previous Government, of whom the right hon. Member for Charnwood was a member, wasted more than half a million pounds of taxpayers' money on a futile legal challenge to the working time directive. That directive will give workers seven new rights. It will give them the right not to work for more than 48 hours a week. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he still opposes that proposal? Will the Conservatives oppose it?

The directive will give more than 2.5 million workers the right—for the first time—to three weeks' paid annual leave, rising to four weeks in 1999. Will the Conservative party still oppose people's right to paid holidays? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Conservatives still oppose that proposal, or will they drop their opposition? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what his party's position is? The answer seems to be no.

The directive will give workers a rest period when they work for six or more hours a day. The Tories oppose that entitlement, regardless of how long people work. Will they now drop their opposition, and support the Government? I give the right hon. Gentleman an opportunity to speak. Will he do so? The answer is no.

The directive will give workers a right to minimum daily and weekly rest periods. The Conservative party is against giving people one day off a week. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us now whether the Conservatives have dropped their opposition to that proposal, or continue to oppose the principle of giving people equal status in terms of days off during the working week? The right hon. Gentleman still does not want to answer.

When he was Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Gentleman opposed regular health checks for night workers, and special protection for young workers. Will he now tell us whether he has dropped his opposition to those proposals? The answer is that he has not even concerned himself with whether those rights should continue.

The truth is that the right hon. Gentleman does not want to have a debate about improving standards in the workplace for millions of British workers. That is because, as an employer, he is implacably opposed to good employment practice—unlike tens of thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands, of employers in Britain who want fair and decent standards, and support the Labour Government's proposals. The right hon. Gentleman is still indicating that the Conservatives oppose minimum standards in the workplace.

Mr. Collins: As the Minister is on the subject of the working time directive and questions about it, will he tell

[Mr. Collins]

us whether the Government are in favour of reducing the maximum working week to 40 hours, as is now being proposed in Europe? If they are against that reduction, how—now that they have given way on qualified majority voting—do they propose to stop it?

Mr. McCartney: Again, the hon. Gentleman shows a distinct lack of knowledge of the subject. The Government are introducing the 48-hour week by implementing the working time directive. Consultations are currently taking place about excluded sectors—the eight European employment areas that are excluded from the directive at present. We will consult on that, and, at an appropriate time, Europe will reach a decision that we will support in principle. *[Interruption.]* We support the principle of decent minimum standards for all workers. Why are the Tories so opposed to that?

The right hon. Member for Charnwood and the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) have shown their lack of interest in the promotion of decent standards in the workplace. They have tried to have a schoolboy debate. They have tried to suggest, rather fatuously, that there is some disagreement between the Labour party and industry over the concept and the principle of introducing trade union recognition.

All those measures are part of the broader strategy that I have described for competitiveness through partnership, decent standards and labour market flexibility. So is trade union recognition. As I have said, we asked the CBI and the TUC to try to narrow their differences. They did so, and produced a joint statement. We have continued to have discussions with them, and have achieved a great deal of agreement. Unlike the right hon. Member for Charnwood, I want to congratulate the CBI and the TUC on the spirit of co-operation with which they have approached the issue, to achieve a constructive way forward and to ensure that the White Paper will meet the needs of everyone in the workplace to secure agreement over recognition and representation.

Mr. MacShane: Surely the whole House should congratulate the CBI and the TUC, especially on their agreement not to go for penal clauses, for fines or for sequestration, which was the vindictive approach of the Conservative party when it was in power. As I understand it, the White Paper will aim for partnership and agreement, not for the use of the heavy hand of the law to victimise one side of industry, as Governments have done in the past.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The purpose of the White Paper is to encourage and promote partnership in the workplace. The world has moved on since 1975: the structure of industry and employment in this country has changed profoundly; the number of trade unions has dropped from 484 in 1976 to 255 in 1996 due to amalgamations; and trade union membership has dropped from a peak of 13 million in 1979 to just under 8 million in 1996.

The trade union movement has responded to those and other developments by changing and modernising. Trade unions are now committed to working with management for their mutual benefit, which is why 88 per cent. of the FTSE top companies already recognise unions voluntarily, and why inward investors such as Toyota and Nissan have willingly recognised trade unions.

We have encouraged the CBI and the TUC to pursue their discussions with the Government. The discussions are making good progress: it would be unrealistic to expect social partners to agree on everything, but I am confident that they will agree on a great deal and will help the Government to put forward balanced, practical proposals.

The proposals will provide a rational, agreed way of resolving disputes. At present, employers are free to ride roughshod over the wishes of their work force. Employers have derecognised or refused to recognise unions against the wishes of an overwhelming majority of the work force, and continue to do so. I do not want to name names or to take sides in disputes that are under way, but that cannot be right—there must be a better way of resolving such disputes than goading trade unions into taking industrial action.

In future, the vast majority of recognition claims will be settled by negotiation between the parties. Our proposals will be designed to encourage voluntary settlements at every stage—legislation will apply only as a last resort, when the parties have reached an impasse despite the good offices of ACAS.

I shall not be drawn on the details of our proposals; I must ask hon. Members to be patient for a little longer. We shall publish the White Paper as soon as we can. I assure them that it will be worth the wait, and all the better for the effort that we have put into building a consensus between the social partners. It will be a consultative document, but, as we said in our manifesto, we shall consult on how to implement the recognition agreement, not on whether to do it. Afterwards, we shall move to legislate as quickly as possible.

The Government are moving quickly and decisively to restore a fair balance of rights and duties in the workplace, to promote partnership and to ensure decent minimum standards. We are well on the way to achieving a national minimum wage, to guaranteed minimum paid holidays, to reasonable rest breaks and an end to unreasonably and harmfully long hours, to equal rights for part-time workers and to a right to reasonable time off for parents, including adoptive parents.

The White Paper will set out our proposals for the last substantial brick in that edifice—a framework of decent employment law for the 21st century. I urge the House to support the Government amendment.

4.38 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): In the first half of his speech, the Minister spoke about what Conservative Members did in government; in the second half, he spoke about what we would do when we got back to government, but he did not appear to have read the first line of the motion.

People rightly criticise the Government for treating the House of Commons with contempt. If he were listening to me instead of consulting hon. Members on the Bench behind him, the Minister might hear the words to which he should have addressed his speech. I should be most grateful if I had his attention. The motion states that the Government should

"define its policy on trade union recognition".

The Minister did not do that: he talked about the White Paper and said that Conservative Members had asked a silly question; he then talked about how he wanted to achieve consensus—but he is stuck with his own words about a silly question being asked.

There are choices to be made about the threshold for union recognition. The Conservative motion makes it clear that the Government have rejected the Opposition's policy. The Confederation of British Industry accepts that the Government's policy will be implemented. Before the Government make a decision, they should spell out their own view, but they have not done so. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) quoted the exchange between the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and the Prime Minister—the "Skinner is innocent, okay" question. The Prime Minister would not give an answer.

Similarly, Government supporters have to look at their bleepers to discover what they are supposed to be thinking. Shortly after the general election, the Conservative Leader of the Opposition asked the Labour Prime Minister whether he intended to introduce prescription charges for pensioners. As expected, the Prime Minister kicked that issue into this year.

What was surprising was that 200 Labour Back Benchers did not shake or nod their heads; they did not even turn their heads in circles. Before the election, they would have made their views known if they had suspected that the Conservatives wanted to introduce prescription charges for pensioners, but now they wait until they feel a tremble in their midriff to see whether they are told to talk to each other, to put a question or to distract attention from the key point.

If any Labour Member present can tell me whether they are in favour of prescription charges for pensioners, will they intervene? Or, to put it a different way, does any Labour Member believe that the Minister of State wants the threshold for union recognition to be a majority of the work force or a majority of those who vote? I shall give way to any Labour Member who can tell me what he or she thinks is in the Minister of State's mind, having listened to half an hour of his speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] Not one Labour Member is willing to intervene.

Mr. Ian McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Bottomley: I shall give way to the Minister of State if he will answer my question. He presumably knew what he was saying during that half hour.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman must either give way or not give way. He cannot put conditions on it.

Mr. Bottomley: I shall give way.

Mr. McCartney: It is very nice of the hon. Gentleman to give way. If Conservative Members were serious, they would have had this debate following publication of the White Paper. The Government made it absolutely clear from the outset—it has never been any clearer—that we will publish a White Paper for consultation. Conservative Members chose to have this debate purely for party political reasons. We will not allow party politics to interfere with good employment relations. I will debate this issue with the hon. Gentleman on any platform after the publication of the White Paper.

Mr. Bottomley: So now we know. The issue that the Minister described as a "silly question" is the subject of disagreement between the CBI and the Trade Union Congress. The Minister says that we should not debate this matter until the details of the Government's policy are published. All I did was ask whether there is a Labour Member present who has an idea of the Minister's view. The TUC and the CBI have a view, and their views have been mentioned. The Minister of State, speaking for the Government, is the only person who does not have a view, or will not tell the House of Commons what it is.

Of course we shall wait for the White Paper, and we shall have a debate on it when it is published. Today's debate is to ask the Government to define their own view. I do not believe that they do not have a view.

Mr. Boswell: They have two, actually.

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, they have two, as my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Stott: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bottomley: I know that I cannot set conditions, but I live in hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell me what he thinks is in the Minister's mind.

Mr. Stott: For years, the hon. Gentleman has worn a Transport and General Workers Union tie. He has been proclaiming his membership of that union ever since he came to the House. If a group of people in a workplace wanted to join the TGWU but were prevented from doing so, what would he do about it?

Mr. Bottomley: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is fully on song. In his earlier intervention, he misunderstood the issue, and he now asks what I would do if someone wanted to join the union. I would welcome them, because I believe in trade union membership. Nothing in the law of this land prevents people from joining a trade union if they so want.

I was elected in 1975, shortly before the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) failed to get elected in a by-election because of the effect of trade union action. At that time, some people were not allowed to join the union of their choice because a Labour majority in the House had forced through legislation that allowed people to be sacked if they were not in the union that Parliament had determined they should join.

Mr. Robathan: It was not a matter of whether people wanted to join a union: they had to join a union to get a job. Is that morally defensible?

Mr. Bottomley: No one defends that practice now. The Minister said that that issue would not be raised. Likewise, the Government have said that they do not intend to overturn the other six employment laws passed by the Conservative Government. We should regard that as progress.

[Mr. Bottomley]

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have plenty to learn about trade unions. Not many Conservative or some Labour Members understand what was required to establish trade unions in the first place. Some hon. Members came to a meeting in the Jubilee Room to discuss Alexander Bowman, otherwise known as the "people's champion", who helped to set up trade unions in Belfast just over 100 years ago. His biography has been written by his great-grandson Terence Bowman. Hon. Members should also learn about people such as Will Crooks, who represented Woolwich, which I also represented.

Many hon. Members do not understand what went into the organisation of people at work in the face of apathy, ignorance and sometimes violent opposition. Many of them do not understand some of the inter-union rivalries, and do not realise how much voluntary time people put into representing their colleagues at work, not just over pay and conditions or health and safety, but in trying to combat prejudice.

Employers may want to take on black car delivery workers, but the predominant group in that trade and in that part of the union say that it must be a whites-only job. Such problems require persistence, courage, sacrifice and service. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) shakes her head, so I assume that she disagrees with me.

The last time I raised a union issue was when I asked the Prime Minister whether he regretted trying to support the challenger to Bill Morris's re-election as general secretary of the TGWU. The Prime Minister told me that I was wrong, and that he had not supported the challenger. I tabled an early-day motion listing the facts chapter and verse—I did not go into what I had heard at Transport house. He has not said that I was wrong.

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): The hon. Gentleman referred to me shaking my head. Along with my hon. Friends, I am shaking my head in total disbelief that the hon. Gentleman feels he has to lecture us about the rights of people at work and the difficulties they face fighting for those rights. Labour Members know perfectly well why people have such problems.

Mr. Bottomley: I did not know that I was lecturing: I was trying to share a common understanding of the background to the better side of trade unions. If Labour Members read the earlier part of my speech, they will understand what I mean.

The Government are trying to duck their responsibility. The Minister spoke about a partnership. What will be the majority threshold if union recognition is to be granted by law? Union recognition is not being granted by agreement with the employer. I said that I believe in unions, and I also believe in union recognition, but we must decide on the threshold.

One of the problems with the new, modern, model Labour party is that it does not understand what has been going on in the recent past. Reference has been made to trade union recognition at GCHQ in Cheltenham. The unions were recognised at GCHQ before the election; the difference was that national unions were not going to be recognised. [*Laughter.*]

Labour Members laugh. In the mid-1980s, we could have asked any Government in NATO—Governments such as those in France, Germany or Italy—"Can your people involved in this sort of work be members of a trade union, and, if so, could they be ordered to strike by their national leadership?" The reply would have been that the question was incomprehensible. First, most of the work that is the equivalent of the work carried out in Cheltenham is done by the services. Secondly, even the most left-wing trade union leaders in other parts of western Europe would not have dreamed of calling for, let alone tolerating, a strike by people in signals intelligence. It is worth remembering those points, and they are worth repeating.

Let us look at the key part of the motion rather than at the Government's amendment, which concludes by referring to the

"majority of the relevant workforce".

That is the dilemma on which the Government are hooked. Our motion asks who will be able to join in the discussions. None of the Labour Members who are in the Chamber will be present, because they do not know what is in the Government's mind and do not know whether they are supposed to agree with what the Government will present.

The White Paper must be difficult to write. In the past, in responding to a serious issue—not a silly question, as the Minister put it—most Ministers would say, "We know the choices." The Minister of State did not even do that. He uttered not a single sentence about the key issue in this debate. That is not because he does not know the issues: he knows them perfectly well.

Why did the Minister not address the issues? It is not just because of union influence in the Labour party, although that is part of it, and it is not just because of the threat of losing money, although that may be part of it as well. It is because the Government do not know how to make the decision, and I do not think that they yet know what decision they want to make. That is why the debate is worth while.

Despite some merits, the Government are full of PR presentation, puff and aggression, and they occasionally raise their voices to above 85 dB. They ought to ask themselves why they have a problem on the issue. The answer is that they do not yet know whom they will offend. My guess is that they will finally come down against the trade union view, and that the unions will accept it. The uncertainty is rather like a Labour Back Bencher standing by the door of the Division Lobby and saying, "I do not want to support you," and the Whip reaching out and pulling him in.

I do not envy the Government their dilemma. They have caused it for themselves, and they should be big enough to talk openly about it in advance of the White Paper. The Minister's words, "It is a silly question," will be tied around his neck as long as the legislation is before the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Mr. MacShane: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On page 421 of "Erskine May", under the heading "Declaration of interest in debate", it is made quite clear that an hon. Member should declare any direct or indirect interest at the beginning of a debate,

particularly if it is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests. May we have a general ruling for the conduct of the rest of the debate, so that, if a right hon. or hon. Member has a direct interest through being a director of a company that does not recognise unions and which stands to gain financial benefit one way or the other from the passing of legislation, he should declare that interest?

Mr. Collins: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall deal first with the original point of order.

First, how Members declare their interests is entirely a matter for them. Secondly, any complaint should be addressed to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, not to the Chair, because such matters are not for the Chair.

Mr. Collins: I was merely going to ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make it clear in your ruling that the same would apply to any hon. Member who is sponsored by a trade union, because he would equally have a clear interest in the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is a code of conduct, and every hon. Member knows how to conduct himself in the House.

Mr. MacShane: Further to my point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the light of Madam Speaker's ruling before Christmas in respect of the former Department of Trade and Industry's deputy shadow spokesman on a related matter, can you rule whether the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who has remunerated directorships in an industrial clothing manufacturer, one Faithful Ltd., which does not recognise trade unions, would have been better advised—I put it no stronger than that—to declare or refer to that interest when he opened the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I have said, that is not a matter for the Chair. How each Member conducts himself in such matters is entirely a matter for him. The right hon. Member was in order, and that is all that I need to concern myself about.

4.54 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I shall start by declaring an interest. I am a member of the Graphical, Paper and Media union, and secretary of its parliamentary group. I can tell the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that no Labour Members are sponsored.

We know why the Opposition have called the debate. It has nothing to do with serious involvement in trying to develop an appropriate framework for fairness at work. It has more to do with posturing, mischief making and union bashing, which is what the previous Government did for 18 years. The least we could have expected was an apology for the vindictive policies of those 18 years, which destroyed workers' rights and jobs, and left Britain with the worst employment laws in the western world. It was disgraceful of Baroness Thatcher to describe hard-working people in trade unions as "the enemy within". In this debate, Conservative Members have done that again.

One of the major reasons for the Tories losing the election in May was their complete disregard for workers' rights. They reduced the safeguards for working conditions, removed protection, and allowed the exploitation of women and young workers. They cut wages councils and created an environment in which bad employers were encouraged. The new Labour Government are starting to redress the balance, which went unchecked for 18 years.

The Government have started to implement Labour's manifesto commitments. Union rights have been restored at GCHQ, check-off has been abolished, the European social chapter has been signed, a national minimum wage has been introduced, and there have been improvements in the conditions for casual and agency workers. Those commitments were not based on political dogma: they were taken on because they were right.

The Government are committed to work and the work ethic. They are restoring opportunities through programmes such as the new deal, assisting and developing regeneration schemes, and working with social partners to generate job opportunities. Those are key parts in the rebuilding of Britain, which is vital to everyone. Work is undoubtedly vital, and it follows that fairness at work is equally important. The notion of consensus in the workplace is clearly the best way to achieve success, and the Government deserve credit for bringing together the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry. The voluntary arrangements they have agreed are welcome.

As the Minister of State knows, our manifesto commitment to trade union recognition was the result of detailed consultation. We rightly said that people should be free to choose whether to join a trade union. When they decide to join, and when a majority in the relevant work force vote for a union to represent them, that union should be recognised.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman is on the crux of the matter. Will he define "the majority" and "the relevant work force", because that is what the motion is about?

Mr. Sutcliffe: If the hon. Gentleman cares to wait, he will hear me speak about that.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman explain the matter?

Mr. Sutcliffe: I shall do that later in my speech.

We said that such a course would promote stable and orderly industrial relations. We were clear about what that meant then, and we are clear on it now. After the election, the Prime Minister asked the CBI and the TUC to meet to narrow the gap. I understand that there have been a number of meetings recently between Ministers and both organisations. That is right, to ensure that the policy is correct. Recognition is vital if unions are to be allowed to do their jobs properly and effectively. All the Government's positive actions so far on employment will be devalued if we do not get the matter right. It is not a question of the TUC winning or the CBI losing: it is a question of what is fair and will work.

[Mr. Sutcliffe]

An NOP poll in August showed that 77 per cent. of people agree that employees should have the right to have their union recognised by their employers when a majority want that. The days of macho management are long gone. An NOP poll of senior human resource managers in Britain's leading 100 companies showed that business is relaxed about union recognition law. Three to one, those managers supported dealing with staff collectively, and said that staff were more likely to be committed to business plans and objectives if they were involved.

More than two thirds of employers said that collective arrangements helped in problem solving, in achieving working flexibility and in winning staff support for change. Furthermore, more than five to one, employers said that collective relationships had improved. An Institute of Management poll of managers showed that 54 per cent. backed a union recognition law.

The evidence shows that unionised workplaces are more likely to train staff and to have lower staff turnover, and that they are safer, and more likely to practise family-friendly policies.

Maria Eagle: Is my hon. Friend aware that accidents at work currently cost the United Kingdom £8.5 billion annually, that £4.5 billion of those costs falls directly on employers, and that accident rates are up to 50 per cent. higher in workplaces without union recognition? Union recognition is therefore better for employers and better for employees, as it enables greater efficiency and a safer workplace.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. She is right to say that small workplaces, particularly those with fewer than 50 employees, have more accidents. A 1994 Green Paper, published by the previous Government, showed that most industrial tribunal cases were brought against companies employing fewer than 50 people.

The Confederation of British Industry and the Opposition—although the Liberal Democrats cannot make up their minds on the matter—say that recognition should be decided by a majority of those eligible to vote, rather than by a simple majority of 50 per cent. plus one of those voting. They think that abstentions should have the same effect as votes against recognition—so that a 70 per cent. yes vote on a 70 per cent. ballot turnout would result in a no vote. If that rule applied to the election of hon. Members, only 14 would have been elected at the general election. Furthermore, no Conservative or Liberal Democrat Members would have been elected. That ballot proposal is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North–East Hertfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that only about 25 per cent. of the private sector work force are in trade unions—most of which are in the larger companies? Does he agree also that, if trade unions are recognised after approval by only a majority of those voting, there will probably be a campaign of creeping unionisation in all Britain's modern industries that currently do not have unions? Does he want that to happen?

Mr. Sutcliffe: There is nothing wrong with that suggestion—which is why 47 of Britain's top 50 companies recognise unions. Contrary to the Opposition's suggestions, we are moving forwards and not backwards. Staff involved in trade unions will be able to act on behalf of other staff.

A simple majority of those voting should suffice in determining union recognition. There were no trigger mechanisms in the Bills on devolution for Scotland and for Wales. If there is a dispute about "the relevant work force" between an employer and a union, a third agency—such as the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, or a similar body—will have to settle the dispute.

The agency should also be independent, and should facilitate negotiations between employers and unions in agreeing the matter. If agreement cannot be reached, the agency would adjudicate on what comprises "the relevant work force". It would be wrong for either employers or unions alone to decide the bargaining unit.

The CBI proposes an exemption for employers who employ fewer than 50 people. The fact is that 90 per cent. of all companies employ fewer than 50 people. If our manifesto commitment is to be implemented, the right must be given to everyone at work, and not exclude 8 million people.

Employees in small firms need protection because of the stresses and strains of working in small business. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) suggested, most accidents and health and safety problems occur in small companies. Moreover, most industrial tribunal cases involve small companies. I therefore hope that we do not exclude small companies from the provisions.

The vast majority of employers work well with their employees. However, a small but significant minority of employers bully and intimidate their staff. The Trades Union Congress recently ran a "bad boss hotline", which was swamped by 5,000 calls in only one week. We therefore have to be cognisant of what is happening in the real world.

The CBI also wants unions to go through two more hoops—another two-hurdle test—which I think would not only be unworkable but invite unscrupulous employers to put pressure on union supporters in their companies.

As the Minister said, the law's objective must be to create a new climate of industrial relations—and so honour Labour's manifesto commitment to improve employment rights and make stronger economic progress. He has attended many meetings of our Back-Bench committees, and knows the great support among Labour Members for a workable solution to recognition issues.

How many times have we heard employers and human resource managers say that staff are the biggest asset of any company? Now is the time for them to prove it. Union recognition is not a matter of the Government doing trade unions' will, but of employees deciding that they want to join a trade union, which they want to be recognised. Enabling employees to make that decision should be the Government's objective.

Union recognition legislation is not about redressing the wrongs of the past. We are dealing with a new situation in a new world. The global economy has increased competition, stress and pressure at the workplace. Inevitably, we will have to ensure that there is greater communication, involvement and understanding in the workplace. Fairness at work legislation will provide a sound foundation for employment policies to take us into the 21st century. It will also be another manifesto commitment that has been honoured.

It is right to consult on the matter. However, if agreement cannot be reached, Ministers will have the support of the majority of the parliamentary Labour party in doing what is right, in reaching a simple, effective and workable solution. Recognition is not about revenge for spiteful past acts, or for the previous Government's sequestration of union funds. It is also not about seeking favours from a Labour Government, who were elected with trade union support. It is about establishing a modern working environment.

A modern democracy should not set hurdles for some that it does not require others to go through, but should establish a framework that balances the needs of employers and employees. I hope that the Government will succeed in gaining the confidence of Britain's workers—a confidence that was so badly shaken, and lost, by the previous Government.

As John Smith said, if trade unions did not exist, they would have to be invented. Ministers are right to try to facilitate consultation, but Britain will be able to achieve its objectives only if we have conciliation in the workplace. If we cannot reach an agreement on union recognition, the Government will have to set minimum standards to stop workers being exploited.

I am prepared to wait for the White Paper, which I hope will be published in the not too distant future. The Government are getting it right, and they have the support of the vast majority of the PLP.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very sorry to interrupt the debate, but I should like to raise an issue that relates not to registration or declaration but to advocacy.

You will be well aware of the rules that have been developed after the Nolan recommendations and the reports of the Standards and Privileges Select Committee. Motion No. 1 on today's Order Paper—on trade union recognition—lists the names of Mr. William Hague, Mr. Peter Lilley, Mr. Stephen Dorrell, Mr. John Redwood, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Mr. James Arbuthnot. The motion also mentions the issue of recognition, and the need in a ballot for support of 50 per cent. of workplace members.

Under the rules of the House, as I understand them, the matter of advocacy may arise when an hon. Member who has placed his or her name on a motion on recognition might speak on that issue in the Chamber. The hon. Member will clearly be advocating on the issue. We have already heard one speech from the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), which may well be the subject of a complaint. I do not know whether there will be a complaint, but understand that some hon. Members are already discussing those matters.

I wonder whether you will rule that any hon. Member who has an interest in recognition should consider whether it is right for them to advocate in the matter in this debate if his or her name is on the motion. That basically means that the five other Conservative Members who can speak in this debate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have the gist of the hon. Gentleman's point of order. These are matters for individual Members of Parliament.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has asked me to give a ruling, and I am giving him one. He may not like it, but I am giving it. These are matters for the individual Member of Parliament. Each individual Member knows how to conduct himself or herself. If there is a complaint from any hon. Member, it can be taken up with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take his seat when I am standing. He is eating into the time of a short debate. In fairness to other hon. Members who are waiting to speak, he must give due regard to them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it another point of order?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will you then make it clear to the rest of those who are named on the motion simply that they should take advice before they advocate in this Chamber on these matters this evening? That is a matter that rests with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know what rests with me. Let me repeat: each hon. Member knows how to conduct himself or herself. I have no need to give anyone advice at this stage. They know the rules, and they know how to conduct their affairs.

5.10 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Conservative Front-Bench team is right to table the motion to challenge the Government's policy on trade union recognition. I congratulate the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry on his frankness in saying that he was not going to tell us what his proposals are tonight—at least he did the House the courtesy of being honest about it—but he did say that it was a question of how recognition of trade unions will operate, not whether it will operate. That is the question: how will it operate? Sadly, we still wait for an answer.

For far too long, the Government have been prevaricating over that policy, relying on vague promises and even vaguer definitions. To rely on the catch-all phrase

> "Trade union recognition shall be a legal right where a majority of the relevant workforce votes in favour"

is not enough. Relevant to what? Relevant to whom? The Government have had time to come to the House and to give us a better understanding of what their policy is.

Having said that, I think that Conservative Members are wrong to simplify the case of trade union recognition, concentrating on the single issue of the percentage of workers voting in a particular electorate, however it might be defined. One of the things that industrial relations and negotiations over the past 30 years have shown clearly is that establishing trade union recognition is far more complex than that. Negotiations that have taken into account the character of a company, its management structure and the location and skills of the work force, have been the successful negotiations that have led to trade union recognition.

[Mr. David Chidgey]

It is wrong also to suggest, as the motion does, that union recognition will occur only by virtue of compulsion—note the word "compulsory" on the Order Paper—through a majority vote. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, many of the United Kingdom's largest and most respected employers have willingly negotiated union recognition in the interests of good industrial relations and good business sense. All would obviously welcome that.

The issue is the establishment of a legal right for an individual worker to be represented by a union, should he so wish—note "should he so wish"—a right to be used as the last resort where negotiation proves impossible.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Is the hon. Gentleman making the point that, although industrial relations procedures have been agreed generally by voluntarism, if a formula is introduced for union recognition that is any different from 50 per cent. plus one, employers would totally unravel the conciliation and consultation procedures that operate in industry now?

Mr. Chidgey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It was a telling one. I do not think that the issue is as simple as that, although I take his point. I am suffering from a cold, so my speech is not as clear as it would be, but perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will be tolerant of that. As my argument develops, perhaps I can show the hon. Gentleman how those points can and must be addressed by the Government.

It is equally wrong to assume that the law does not need changing to provide individual rights for the individual worker. There are far too many examples of workers' wishes being frustrated by intransigent firms that refuse to recognise or, even worse, that derecognise established unions. I could mention some classic examples, although I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to contribute. I have to say just "Walkers Crisps" and I am sure that that will raise a few points of recognition among Labour Members. Even Railtrack has basically derecognised its white collar staff, despite the fact that some 92 per cent. of Railtrack's white collar workers wish to stay within the union negotiation machinery.

The Government's amendment is a disappointment because it still fails to address the key issue. As has been pointed out, many of the initiatives they list are laudable and already attract all-party support. Certainly, the Liberal Democrats support the broad ideals of adopting a partnership approach to setting decent minimum standards in the workplace; how could any sensible person think otherwise?

We agree that those ideals are essential for competitiveness and business success, but the key issue, which the Conservatives are right to raise, is the mechanism to be introduced to establish trade union recognition. The Government's amendment claims that they should be congratulated on being committed—I must quote this; it is important—

"to fulfilling the Government's commitment to enable workers to enjoy union recognition where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them."

That is an awful lot of commitment to an undefined and non-specific formula. That lack of precision creates confusion and concern among unions and employers alike.

I take one example, which is close to my heart because it concerns a local haulier in my Eastleigh constituency. He runs a third-generation family business. He tells me that he employs some 20 drivers, of whom four belong to a union. Most of his drivers have been with him for many years. All are paid on the same pay scale, regardless of whether they belong to a union, as hon. Members might expect from a responsible employer.

That employer knows his drivers very well; they are obviously friends and have worked together for many years. He estimates that, should there be a ballot on union recognition, no more than six or possibly eight of the 20 would bother to vote, such is their attitude to the issue. That illustrates the predicament of relying on a quick and simple ballot to decide on recognition.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The House is listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman's balanced speech. Does he agree that, from what we have heard from Labour Members, Ministers are willing to talk more openly behind the closed doors of Labour party meetings in this House than in the Chamber? Is that not the difficulty in trying to have this debate?

Mr. Chidgey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but, as clearly the doors were closed, I cannot possibly comment on what might have been going on behind them.

It is not good enough to hide behind, if not closed doors, then such phrases as

"a majority of the relevant workforce".

The Government know that that is just a smokescreen for masking what is clearly the complex and potentially divisive issues surrounding union recognition.

It is not good enough, either, to offload the problem on to the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry and expect them to come up with a solution. Although they have done sterling work—they should be congratulated on that—just a cursory glance through the annual reports of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service over the past 20 or 30 years shows that expecting the TUC and the CBI to resolve the problem is not enough. Records of attempts in the 1970s to establish a strategy framework for union recognition through ACAS make it clear that both the TUC and CBI held and still hold totally intractable and different positions.

I am sure that most hon. Members will have received—in fact, it is clear from the contributions so far in this debate that most Members have indeed received—extensive lobbying packages from both the TUC and the CBI, and they are using them according to their views. It is clear that neither the TUC nor the CBI has shifted its fundamental philosophical position on this issue for more than 30 years, so it is totally unrealistic for the Government to attempt to shift the burden of

responsibility for defining a consultative and democratic process for union recognition to those two parties, which have held diametrically opposed ideological standpoints.

Mr. Woolas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chidgey: Yes, but this will be the last time.

Mr. Woolas: I listened with interest to the example that the hon. Gentleman gave. To my mind, it is a good example of precisely why the Government are correct to consult both sides of industry. If his starting point is that the two sides have irreconcilable positions, surely the Government are doing the responsible thing. Is not the hon. Gentleman falling into the trap laid by the Conservatives? The Conservatives have chosen to debate trade union recognition at exactly the time the Government are consulting. If Ministers were to lay down precisely how to achieve the commitment that they gave, would he not be complaining about the lack of consultation?

Mr. Chidgey: The Government might be consulting the two sides of industry—the TUC and the CBI—but I am interested to know whether they are consulting both sides of the Labour party, let alone the rest of the House.

For Members who believe that union recognition is simply a matter of deciding on a formula, reference to the annual report of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service for 1981 will prove enlightening. In that report, ACAS set out details of its experience of involvement in implementing trade union recognition under the statutory procedures of the Employment Protection Act 1975, with which many hon. Members will be very familiar for various reasons.

ACAS examined some 1,600 cases involving recognition. It is worth noting that more than 80 per cent. were resolved voluntarily. ACAS found that the key issues included: the level of existing union membership—there were often several unions in the same workplace, each hoping to be the recognised union; what agreement there was for one, two or even more unions to be recognised and involved in the negotiating group; the grading of the work force and their skill base—whether they were blue or white collar; the location of the company—whether it was on multiple sites undertaking the same or different tasks, or undertaking a single task on a single site; and the structure of the company—whether it had a centralised personnel department or bargaining was site-specific.

It is worth stressing that, to establish a case for union recognition, ACAS surveyed workers, asking, among other things, whether they were union members; whether they supported collective bargaining in general; and, if they supported representation by the applicant union, whether they would join that union or would prefer representation by another union. ACAS took account of all these factors when it came to its conclusions, but the one thing that it did not do was introduce a ballot to establish the case for recognition. In fact, it took the view that a ballot could be useful in applying a test for recognition but could rarely determine the issue by itself.

In more than 90 per cent. of cases, ACAS received a response rate of more than 65 per cent. On looking more closely at those surveys with low response rates, ACAS concluded that in half there was enough evidence to support recognition. However, in some cases, ACAS did not consider that majority support among respondents warranted recognition, thus showing how complex the issue can be.

It is clear from the report that ACAS was scarred by the experience. Let us remember that ACAS is a tripartite organisation, comprising representatives from both sides of industry, from the CBI and the TUC, and independent representatives. Clearly, ACAS found that its involvement with the statutory process sat uncomfortably with its independent arbitration and conciliation role. It is not surprising that it reported that it was

"extremely difficult to envisage a statutory procedure for compulsory trade union recognition which could operate smoothly."

It is not surprising that, in a letter in 1981 to the then Secretary of State for Employment, the chairman of ACAS wrote:

"The experiences of the last three years of operation of the statutory procedures have shown the difficulties of operating without criteria and the damaging effect on industrial relations which can result from the Court's interpretation of the statutes . . . The Council wishes me to advise you that in the light of the increasing difficulties which it is encountering it cannot satisfactorily operate the statutory recognition procedures as they stand".

It is interesting to note that, when the Government were challenged on their position on union recognition during the general election campaign, it eventually emerged that they took the view that any disagreements about recognition would go initially to ACAS and then to a central arbitration committee which would in future be headed by a judge. ACAS has made it clear that it is not keen to undertake that role.

ACAS clearly tended to favour a voluntary approach, which had been successful in 80 per cent. of cases referred to it, but that still leaves 20 per cent. of cases unresolved. It is to deal with that 20 per cent. that the Government must come up with firm, precise proposals on how they intend to ensure that the individual wishes of workers are not frustrated.

We believe that the rights of individual workers should be protected. Workers should be able to exercise their wish to join or not to join a union. I can understand the Government's difficulties—

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian) *rose*—

Mr. Chidgey: No, I must continue.

Clearly, positions are entrenched, and people will not budge. There is a record of increasing difficulty in operating statutory recognition procedures. The Government claim that they believe in consultation and in a partnership approach, so let them bring their proposals to Parliament, and let the House consider, deliberate and decide.

5.25 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I understand that I do not need to declare an interest but, for the benefit of the House, I am happy to declare that I am a member of the Transport and General Workers Union and of the National Union of Teachers.

It is every worker's right to belong to a trade union. Trade unions were hounded and vilified by the previous Government. We had 18 years of constant, hysterical

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

attacks, and we heard this afternoon from the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) that the Conservatives' attitude to trade unions has not changed.

In May last year, the Labour party won the election, and the manifesto on which all Labour Members fought that election was clear, certainly to me. The manifesto stated:

"People should be free to join or not to join a trade union. Where they do decide to join and where a majority of the relevant work force vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised."

Regardless of the huge majority that we won, the Confederation of British Industry, in its arrogance, remains opposed to the principle of recognition. I am well aware of why the Opposition called this debate today, but it seems that not many Conservatives are interested in attending.

It is right that the Government now keep their manifesto commitment on union recognition, which is the cornerstone of protection for workers in employment. There must be no compromises. Why? First, it is a basic civil right for people at work to be represented by a union if they so choose. Union recognition is simply the right to be heard. Secondly, there are many cases of exploitation in employment across Britain, with many examples in my own northern region. I appreciate that many companies treat their staff very well, and some treat them reasonably well, but there are shocking examples of exploitation which have been highlighted by the Trades Union Congress's bad bosses hotline which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) mentioned.

Thirdly, most workers, given the opportunity, would choose to be represented by a union. A TUC-commissioned national opinion poll revealed that 77 per cent. of people make this choice. In such circumstances, employers should be required by law to negotiate with a trade union. I sincerely hope that the rumours are untrue that the Government are backtracking on their commitments after intensive lobbying by the CBI, which has expounded one myth after another.

Myth No. 1 is that unions hold back business. As we have heard this afternoon, most of Britain's top companies recognise unions; 44 of the top 50 FTSE companies recognise unions; 42 of the 45 companies that employ more than 25,000 workers recognise unions; Britain's biggest employer is also the most heavily unionised of the large supermarket traders.

Myth No. 2 from the CBI is that negotiations should be left to voluntary arrangements. Unions prefer to negotiate with employers on a voluntary basis, but why should the management veto the democratic rights of a work force? The introduction of a law will encourage the voluntary resolution of recognition claims. Other laws already require employers to consult and deal with their work force on various issues, most notably on health and safety. That rarely causes a problem.

Myth No. 3 is that union recognition will encourage more industrial action and strikes. That is not true. If an employer refuses to deal with or recognise a union, the only remedy open to the work force is industrial action. A statutory procedure will make it more likely that such disputes can be resolved without industrial action.

I do not have enough time to go into every detail of the CBI's attempts to frustrate trade union recognition, but I shall concentrate on a few of the worst examples.

Mr. Bercow: Go on. Go for it.

Mr. Steinberg: I do not want any comments from the hon. Gentleman, who has a big mouth and should learn to keep it shut occasionally.

The CBI wants abstentions in a recognition ballot to count as votes against. It argues that a majority of those eligible to vote, not of those who cast a vote, must be achieved. The CBI opposed proposals for that requirement in strike ballots, but that is not surprising. There is no justification for having different rules for trade union recognition ballots from those that apply to other ballots, including the election of Members of Parliament. A simple majority of 50 per cent. plus one of those who vote should lead to automatic recognition. Requiring a majority of those entitled to vote would be a recipe for industrial unrest.

If the principle that the CBI is in favour of had applied to the recent general election, a large majority of Labour Ministers and Back Benchers would not have been elected. On 1 May, I received 31,102 votes. My nearest rival, the Conservative candidate, got 8,598 votes. My majority was 22,504.

Mr. Bercow: That was in spite of you.

Mr. Steinberg: I have told the hon. Gentleman what I think of him.

The electorate of the City of Durham was 69,[illegible] I would not have been elected under the CBI's destructive proposals. It is a fair bet that no Conservative Members would have been elected, either. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), who has obviously done some research, substantiated that this afternoon, so I think that I would win my bet. However, looking at some Conservative Members, I am beginning to change my mind. Perhaps it would not be such a bad idea to have that system in the House of Commons.

The proposal is nonsense. A ballot cannot be conducted in that way. Requiring a majority of those entitled to vote would be a recipe for industrial unrest. Workers will accept the result of a fairly conducted ballot under well-understood principles. The CBI's proposals would rig the outcome in advance. They cannot be accepted.

Those on the Labour Front Bench were scathing about the idea when we were in opposition. In November 1996, my right hon. Friend who is now the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said:

"What justification has the right hon. Gentleman for the changes he proposes to make in the balloting rules and procedures to deny people a simple majority? Is it not a fact that, on 1 November, on the Radio 4 'Today' programme, he said that he had got the proposal from his local golf club rules? Frankly, that is an insult to everyone engaged in industrial relations."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 846.]

That argument promoted by the Opposition Front Bench in 1996 when a Tory Government were in office is equally valid today with a Labour Government in office.

Another area of disagreement is the CBI's insistence on a minimum threshold under which small businesses would be exempt from recognition procedures. Half of

Britain's work force is employed in enterprises with fewer than 100 employees. The CBI wants to disfranchise 50 per cent. of this country's work force, excluding them from the protection of legislation on recognition. That is unacceptable.

The last threat to trade union recognition that I want to mention is the definition of the bargaining unit. That is crucial to the operation of a statutory recognition procedure. The CBI wants the employer to have the sole right to define the extent or limitation of the bargaining unit. That would enable an employer to exclude particular sections of the work force—for example, by separating white collar from blue collar workers—or to define the bargaining unit as the whole company when a trade union is seeking recognition for a specific section. Unscrupulous employers would change the definition to suit their circumstances. The union should have an equal right to define the group of workers it seeks to represent. If that cannot be resolved by negotiation or conciliation, an independent representation agency should rule. The employer should have no veto.

Our approach to fairness at work is underpinned by three fundamental principles. Access to justice should not depend on the number of people employed at a workplace or the type of work that is undertaken. It should also not depend on hours of work or length of service. The principles should apply to all employees at all workplaces.

The first principle is the right to representation. Everyone at work should have a basic right to representation in their dealings with their employer. That is a democratic right for every citizen, which should be enshrined in legislation.

The second principle is the right to recognition for collective bargaining purposes. Trade union recognition should be automatic when a majority is in favour. If the issue has to go to ballot, those voting should demonstrate the majority. There should be no exceptions to the collective bargaining agenda. Trade unions and employers should be free to discuss and negotiate on the whole range of issues that apply to the work force. Trade unions and employers must be involved in a partnership to raise the training and skill levels of the work force.

The third principle is the right to consultation. All workers must have the right to be consulted on matters that affect their working lives, including pay, working conditions and their future job security. If the CBI's gerrymandering is accepted, the law will be so weak that it will no longer be in line with the manifesto on which I fought the general election. There must be no compromise.

5.37 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I declare that I have no pecuniary interest in the debate, but I have an interest in good industrial relations, good working conditions for all employees and employers and the prosperity of this country, furthered by good industrial and business conditions. That is what the debate is about.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) was uncharacteristically discourteous to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). He was also a little off message. He may have to tune in his bleeper later and discuss that with the Whip.

Mr. Steinberg: I do not have a bleeper.

Mr. Robathan: In that case, the hon. Gentleman is definitely off message. However, he is not normally as rude as he was to my hon. Friend.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about myths. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) spoke about the realities of trade union membership. The Minister of State, who, sadly, is not in his place, spoke about progress and said that we must not go back in time. We need to go back a little way and think about the past. Experience of the past colours our view. I fear that we may be going back to the bad old days if we are not careful.

Among some Labour Members there is a romantic notion that trade unions exist to protect the rights of very downtrodden workers from the wrongs of evil Victorian mill owners and the like. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear the unreconstructed voice of old Labour responding. My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) spoke about trade union history. I accept that trade unions have done much good. Improvements in working conditions and pay owe much to their work.

At the same time, however, I have seen many who have regarded union power as almost an end in itself—indeed, a route to political authority. My youth was characterised by such marvellous people as Jack Dash. I recall him well, and how he almost single-handedly whipped up London dockers and destroyed the London docks. I recall Red Robbo, as will Labour Members who were in the House in the 1970s. He did lasting damage to the British car industry. At that time, trade union leaders were in No. 10 Downing street, where it was beer and sandwiches all round. I realise that it will be Chianti and Tuscan wine in future. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) referred to the White Paper "In Place of Strife". I remember Barbara Castle's dashed optimism on that.

The past winter has been the first that the country has had to endure under a Labour Government for 19 years. I remember the winter of discontent 19 years ago. The Labour Government under Lord Callaghan, as he now is, went into that winter ahead in the opinion polls, but came out of it to find that the country had at last seen sense. The electorate voted in a Conservative Government because of the chaos of that winter. I give Labour Members due warning that, after the chaos of this Labour Government, the people will be electing another Conservative Government.

Mr. Collins: My hon. Friend is giving us a fascinating history lesson. Does he recall that "In Place of Strife" was destroyed by a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, who undermined his Prime Minister by putting first his own links with the trade unions? Does he recall that that Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer subsequently became Labour Prime Minister? Might not history repeat itself?

Mr. Robathan: I must stay in order, so I beware of following too closely my hon. Friend's argument, except to say that I understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been making various comments to various union leaders, which have been well reported in the press. Perhaps we shall hear from Government Front Benchers about that matter—although I doubt it.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend has provided the House with some learned reflections on memorable trade union figures of this century. I am sure that he would not want his speech to pass without giving Labour Members the benefit of his confirmation that one of the people

[Mr. Bercow]

who made the greatest contribution in the 20th century to British trade unions was none other than our noble Friend Lord Tebbit of Chingford.

Mr. Robathan: I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that Lady Thatcher did so, too.

Since the winter of discontent, after 18 years of Conservative government, we have remarkable industrial relations. Indeed, they are the envy of the rest of Europe. We consistently have the lowest number of days lost to strikes—certainly in my memory. Does anybody in the House remember the English disease? That has been cured. We remember the closed shop, which has effectively been destroyed.

As a result of that excellent record of industrial relations, we have outstanding inward investment, which is praised by Labour Members. They must ask themselves why companies want to invest in this country. *[Interruption.]* They say that inward investment is declining; it is perfectly evident that that is because of what happened on 1 May. We have a profitable industry—profitable for employees as well as for those awful Victorian mill owners. The interests of employees are best served by prosperous companies and good industrial relations, not necessarily by trade union bosses.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman talks about Victorian mill owners. Will he comment on an employer in Liverpool who pays his staff £2.97 for a 12-hour week? The staff have had no pay rise for six years, and their employer charges them 12p each for a tea-bag. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that is good industrial relations?

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Lady raises a case of which I have no knowledge. Nobody in the House would defend bad employer practices. [HON. MEMBERS: "You are."] On the contrary. Nobody defends Victorian mill owners whipping their employees into work. We Conservatives are saying that employees are better off than ever before because of the industrial relations packages that we implemented.

The Government have a manifesto commitment on statutory trade union recognition after a ballot. How many people should have to take part in such a ballot? The hon. Member for City of Durham believes that the majority should be 50 per cent. plus one of those who vote. He must get that bleeper soon. The hon. Member for Bradford, South also said that he believed that. He might like to check his bleeper later.

Now that Labour is in government, we need to know what it is saying about trade union recognition. I asked the Minister of State, but he had nothing to say. The Labour manifesto states:

"where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised."

Surely we must be told what that means. We do not need the Prime Minister to consult on it. Of course unions and employers have different views. I am delighted that the Prime Minister appears to be taking the CBI's position—but will it hold under pressure from his Back Benchers? That is what we would like the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry to answer.

Mr. Boswell: Has my hon. Friend noticed, as I have, that the Minister of State clearly prefers the company of his officials to that of his Back Benchers who have been contributing to the debate?

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the Minister's officials are excellent company, although I would have hoped that he found the company of his Back Benchers congenial, too.

Following the election, before which the unions gave the Labour party such sterling service and support—much of it reflected in the Register of Members' Interests—the unions want their pound of flesh. In this case, that is statutory union recognition. Although the CBI is not always right, it is on this occasion. Good employee relations are not best served by statutory union recognition. Nobody approves of bad employers, but such recognition would not further good employee relations.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): If the hon. Gentleman is so opposed to bad employers, why, following the past 18 years, are there still employers in my constituency and others who pay £1.20 an hour? If Conservatives are so concerned about employee rights, why did not the Conservative Government take action on the matter?

Mr. Robathan: If the hon. Gentleman would like a long debate on the minimum wage, I should be very happy to participate. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) may go into that in his own speech. I am not defending one bad employer; I am defending good industrial relations after 18 years of Conservative government. Why did we have the winter of discontent after four or five years of a Labour Government if Labour's practices were so good?

What is the new Government's real position? They raise in their amendment what is likely to be their real position—although it is clouded by other things. They talk about the minimum wage and the social chapter. When unemployment increases following the introduction of the minimum wage and the social chapter, I look forward to hearing Ministers explain why that has happened.

I urge the House to support the motion. We have prosperous industry, good industrial relations and a well-off work force. Those have been created by not having the form of legislation proposed by the Government. Let us remember the picketing and secondary picketing. Some Labour Members may have been at Grunwick in the 1970s, which I recall, or the Orgreave coking station. Some may have been at Wapping. One wonders whether any Labour Member defended Rupert Murdoch's actions at Wapping, and whether any would now criticise him. I should like to hear Labour Members criticise Rupert Murdoch in later speeches.

I remember the three-day week, under a Conservative Government, but I remember more than anything the winter of discontent, which has coloured industrial relations since 1979. The new Government have learnt nothing from the past 19 years. They hear threats from

Bill Morris, who says that there is no scope for compromise. He says that statutory trade union recognition

"is a defining issue for trade unionists. There is no room for compromise. The Government will not be able to fulfil its commitment to fairness at work by legislation for bad employers, which is what a compromise would mean."

We know what the trade unions believe, but not what the Government believe. It is fair that we should know. The Government find themselves impaled on a fork—they do not know which way to go.

I paid a visit recently to a business in my constituency which is the third largest private employer in Leicestershire. I asked employees about their pay and conditions, which they all said were marvellous. Furthermore, each employee has private health insurance—one might say that they should not need it—from the employer, who pays higher wages than his competitors and is more profitable. That is an example to employers and employees. I further believe that good practices by employers lead to profitable businesses, happy employees and no strikes. That is what we are working for, and it is not what recognition will bring.

Share rights for employees have been mentioned in the debate. Asda—of which my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) has been a distinguished chairman—offers every employee share rights. That is the way forward—that is progress. The Minister's proposals are going backwards to the ideologically bankrupt bad old days. He also mentioned falling membership of trade unions. Are the proposals designed purely to bolster that falling membership? I fear that they might be. We have good industrial relations, good working companies and improving pay for employees. We do not need further statutory union recognition and bad industrial legislation.

5.52 pm

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): I wish to declare an interest to the House. I am proud to be a member of the GMB, and I am secretary of the GMB group in Parliament. I am privileged to be the vice-chair of the trade union group in Parliament.

In the short time that the Government have been in power, they have made great steps forward to modernise and support industrial relations and social partnership within the world of work. They have produced a significant—indeed, historic—Bill to introduce a national minimum wage, on which trade unions and employers have campaigned for many years.

After the general election in May last year, the Prime Minister asked the TUC and the CBI to "narrow the gap" on trade union recognition. Key areas have been discussed with both parties, and great progress has been made. The expected White Paper, "Fairness at Work", will bring about much-needed legislation to bring Britain's business and workers into a modern, thriving economy.

Sadly, far too many employers do not realise voluntarily that a change of Government means a change of attitude at work. Such a change of attitude is expected. Most employers treat their staff fairly, but too many take advantage of the lack of legal protection to exploit and bully their staff. Without the support of a union, people are often unable to enforce their legal rights.

I should like to say a few words about a dispute that is taking place in west London, affecting the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell), who is in his place. Most of the workers at the company, Noon Products, are part of the west London Punjabi community that extends into my own constituency of Brentford and Isleworth.

Noon Products provides chilled and frozen ready-made Indian meals for supermarkets, including Sainsbury, Waitrose and Somerfield. Almost all the production workers at Noon Products approached the GMB and voluntarily joined within a three-week period during October 1997. They wanted the GMB to help resolve the many grievances that they had with the company—for example, low pay, excessive hours, favouritism and an unequal pay structure.

The GMB has continually asked to meet with the company to discuss the grievances, and union rights and recognition. Noon Products continually refuses to meet the GMB, or to acknowledge that more than 80 per cent. of the work force—250 workers—are GMB members. The company has tried to victimise a GMB steward, Rana Hussain, and the pressurise members to leave the union continues. The company has appointed a new senior supervisor to pursue that objective.

More than 15,000 people in one week signed a petition to protest at the way in which the community and the work force at a local company were being treated. Along with my hon. Friends the Members for Southall and for Hayes and Harlington, I am pursuing the matter, and the petition has been taken to Downing street. The GMB has called upon the company to invite an independent body to ballot the workers on union recognition, and has suggested that the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service or the Electoral Reform Society be involved. The company has stated that it will abide by any industrial relations proposals only when they are made law.

Many of the work force are, of course, women, and women at work today continue to have a rougher deal than their male colleagues. There is still a pay gap.

Mr. Dismore: As a fellow member of the GMB, could I refer to the problem of recognition—particularly affecting women workers—in the casino industry, where the GMB has been waging a campaign on recognition? A dispute with Napoleon's casino—where 60 per cent. of the work force are GMB members—has been going on for eight months. The owner, David Allan, and the manager, Kevin Hapley, have been campaigning against union recognition. Through the GMB, there have been two applications to industrial tribunals on trade union victimisation. Is not that another example of bad employers trying to defeat the will of the work force, because there is no law to protect them?

Ann Keen: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. It is obvious that there is still much to do, and trade union recognition is the only way forward.

There is still a glass ceiling for women in many organisations. Too few employers operate family-friendly employment practices that make equal opportunities policies a reality. Without trade unions, life at work for many women would be much worse.

Women make up half the work force. Many work in small businesses or on a casual homeworker or other flexible basis, where they are extremely vulnerable to unscrupulous employers or managers. As has been stated,

[Ann Keen]

in 1997—towards the end of this century—the TUC felt it necessary to set up a bad bosses hotline. That revealed a catalogue of exploitation, bullying, low pay, long hours and job insecurity. More women than men who worked for firms employing fewer than 50 staff made calls to the hotline.

The hotline revealed care homes, which are a main employer of women, as one of the three worst industries. More than 500,000 people work in care homes, and 86 per cent. of them are women. I shall give an example from the hotline.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Ann Keen: I will not give way.

One worker had just had a pay rise—to £2.86 an hour. For that payment, round-the-clock shifts were expected, with no sick pay, pension or holiday entitlements.

Another example of non-union recognition is the cross-channel ferry industry. Alcohol is big business on cross-channel transport, with staff expected to take the consequences when passengers become drunk and abusive. One of the women who contacted the TUC's hotline worked as a steward for a catering company on a cross-channel ferry—a company that does not recognise trade unions. She and her colleagues regularly have to put up with harassment from drunk passengers, yet, while airlines refuse to serve alcohol to passengers who are drunk, that company tells its staff to continue to serve and sell alcohol even though they may feel unsafe.

Trade unions have changed a great deal in recent years. Partnerships rather than adversity now dominate industrial relations. Unions have changed how they work and how they campaign. Through campaigning and negotiation with employers, unions have promoted working conditions that help members to balance work and family responsibilities, which is so important in all families, but particularly so when lone parents are at work. Union recognition is good business practice. Macho, top-down management is long past its sell-by date. Organisations that treat staff as partners succeed, and manage change with the best benefit.

A recent poll of human resource managers in the top companies found that they were relaxed about trade union recognition.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ann Keen: I am sorry, but I am short of time and cannot give way.

Such managers value the opportunity that trade unions bring for good communication; they recognise that it is an effective way in which to deliver loyalty and commitment, and that it is good for business.

Finally, I want the House to recognise the work that has been done at national and European level by the good partnership that the TUC and the CBI have established. They have worked effectively together to draw up policies and directives to benefit women and men at work. Many new opportunities are opening up in the new world of work.

The new deal for young people had its national launch today. Welfare to work and the much-needed modernisation of the welfare state are encouraging more people to take up work, but some of them are very vulnerable. To help everyone to succeed with new work, we also need new unionism. We have that new unionism. It is emerging at the end of the 20th century, as unionism did in the 19th century, to take up those new challenges.

I hope that the House will take seriously its business as regards the economy as well as the way in which it represents constituents, many of whom we hope are at work. The TUC and the CBI should be given the best wishes of the House for good and progressive debate, as should our Government, to deliver a modern trade union partnership with industry that will advance fairness and justice for Britain's workers and the business community. As we have said, we may not be the biggest country in the world—we certainly are not the biggest in the world of work—but we could be the fairest, which would make us the best.

6.6 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I wish to be brief, because I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) an opportunity to speak, as I know he is keen to do so.

During the debate, we have had a fair number of trips down memory lane, with repeated incantations about 18 years of Conservative rule. I wish that I had £5 for every time Labour Members referred to those 18 years. They think that it is some sort of insult to the Conservative party, but, by referring to that long period in which Conservative Governments were elected, re-elected and re-elected again, they are insulting the judgment of the British people who, time and again, saw fit to re-elect Conservative Governments and reject Labour, often because of its espousal of the very policies that the proposed Government measure would reintroduce into industrial relations.

We have heard derogatory references to "the enemy within", as an expression used by Margaret Thatcher. I remember when she used that expression and the circumstances in trade union affairs about which she used it. I remember the events in the Civil and Public Services Association, which was infiltrated by the same Militant Tendency—or Revolutionary Socialist League as it really was—that it took Labour so long to gear itself up to expel from its ranks. I remember when Kate Losinska, a genuine trade unionist, was attacked, beaten and tripped downstairs by the enemy within.

Yes, the Militant Tendency was the enemy within the CPSA, and my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher was right to use that expression. She was right to use it not only about the termites burrowing in from the Fourth International, but about the National Union of Mineworkers and Mr. Scargill and his sponsors—

Mr. Clapham: Does the hon. Gentleman realise the enormous contribution that those who worked in the mines made during the first and second world wars? Does he realise that, before the first world war, there were more than 1 million miners and that enormous sacrifices were made in mining communities? Is he slighting that contribution?

Dr. Lewis: On the contrary: it was Mr. Scargill who slighted those brave miners when, time and again, during

those arguments he refused to give them a ballot on whether they should be conducting an industrial dispute. Mr. Scargill would not give his members the right to a ballot while he used them to pursue his political objectives rather than look after their interests. His campaign was funded by foreign communist regimes, which openly collected huge sums of money—there was no voluntarism about contributing for Soviet trade union members, believe me—to help him undermine British industrial relations while the people of those regimes were being incarcerated for political offences.

I also remember how a change came about, so I shall move on to the more positive aspects. The introduction of compulsory secret postal ballots was the reason for that change. The measures were partly introduced in the Trade Union Act 1984 and completed in the Employment Act 1988.

I pay particular tribute to the late Lord Wyatt of Weeford, whose memorial service I had the privilege to attend last week, for his fantastic work to expose communist manipulation in the Electrical Trade Union and to highlight the shortcomings in the Thatcher Government's plan—which did not include making secret postal ballots compulsory until he drew those shortcomings to their attention and the measures were drawn into the legislation. I hope that the Minister will reply to this point, even if it is the only point to which he replies, as even if the Government cannot—

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) referred to a dispute in which a number of my constituents are engaged. It is important that we use the House for constructive debate and, if we can, to give constructive assistance in that dispute, which concerns 80 per cent. of a work force who have joined the GMB and request that their employer assists them in organising a ballot to ensure that, as a result, the employer recognises the union.

Will the hon. Gentleman join me in uniting the House to call on the employer to recognise the trade union that now represents 80 per cent. of the work force and, in so doing, assist in the resolution of the dispute?

Dr. Lewis: The issue relates to the point that I was making, so the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I will not pronounce on that dispute without more information; but we may reach agreement on the following point. Does he agree—and, with due respect, more important, does the Minister agree—that, whatever threshold the Government finally decide on for their legislation—whether it be 50 per cent. of those voting or of those entitled to vote, or some other percentage of either—they should undertake today that the votes will be in a tamper-proof, secret, postal ballot?

The 1984 and 1988 legislation, to which I alluded, greatly improved the trade union leadership's representativeness of its members because of the introduction of the secret postal ballot, which stopped ballot rigging and led, for example, in the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union to the replacement of a Stalinist such as Ken Gill on retirement by a moderate such as Roger Lyons.

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): I want to deal with the facts. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Electrical Trades Union, of which I was a member. The villainy inside the ranks of that union was exposed not by Lord Wyatt, but by people such as myself—rank and file shop stewards. In 1962, I was elected branch secretary in Leeds as an anti-communist. It is important that the distortions that Conservative Members continue to pour out are put straight. You need to be corrected on another element—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No one needs to correct me on the history of the electrical trade unions.

Mr. Best: I wanted to say that the virtues of the postal ballot are not all that the hon. Gentleman claimed. Postal ballots can be manipulated, and I was a victim of such manipulation—1,800 ballot papers ended up at the address of one employer, so that the members of the trade union could vote in the comfort of the employer's offices.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. With all due respect to his no doubt heroic part in rescuing the ETU, I say that, if we are to give plaudits, we should do so to people such as the late Sir Leslie Cannon, who led that fight. There is no reason to deny the crucial role played by Woodrow Wyatt, whose investigations as a "Panorama" reporter made it possible for people such as, I trust, the hon. Gentleman and, certainly, the late Sir Les Cannon to bring their campaign into the open and eventually to win their court case.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that postal ballots can be rigged. Much of the ballot rigging in the ETU occurred despite the postal vote, which is why I said that postal ballots must be tamper-proof and independent.

Mr. McDonnell: The hon. Gentleman asked about the Noon workers; they have requested an independent ballot, in whatever form is acceptable to the majority and to the employer, on recognition. The dispute is one of the most bitter in west London—it is souring the whole community, and affects the most vulnerable section of that community. I ask the hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members to urge the employer to resolve the dispute constructively, so that good community relations can be restored in the area.

Dr. Lewis: I take those remarks in the spirit in which they were meant, and I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman in urging constructive moves by both sides in any bitter dispute.

Even if the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry cannot tell us today the Government's intentions on percentages—whether the percentage will be of all the work force or of all those voting—will she at least guarantee that any voting mechanism that is established will be tamper-proof, secret and by postal ballot?

6.13 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I understand that I need not declare my interests, but I shall. I am currently a member of two trade unions. Before I was a Member of Parliament, I was both regional and national officer of a trade union, and I have worked for trade unions for almost 18 years.

We have heard much about trade unions from Conservative Members, and I certainly shall not go down the route suggested by the hon. Member for New Forest,

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

East (Dr. Lewis), who embarked on a union-bashing exercise and added nothing constructive to the debate. I tell him that two centuries of trade unionism in Britain have shown that trade unions are to the betterment of democracy—that argument is accepted by no less a person than Professor Galbraith, who regards trade unionism as a civilising influence. Implementation of trade union recognition will no doubt also be a civilising influence on the shop floor. Trade unions bring great benefits not only to their members, but, as has clearly been shown, to business. I shall expand on that point in a moment.

If we compare the last quarter of this century with the third quarter, we can see that there have been enormous changes in the industrial scene, arising from the different sizes of industrial units and privatisation. Those changes are well documented, and, although I shall have to skirt over them, I want to put straight the hon. Members for New Forest, East and for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on the facts that they misconstrued.

We know that there has been a fall in trade union membership in the past 25 years, but that was brought about not by the implementation of Mrs. Thatcher's trade union legislation between 1980 and 1990, but primarily by unemployment. If Conservative Members had done a little research, they would have come across the evidence given to the Select Committee on Employment—it reported in 1995, I think—which stated that the reason for the fall in trade union membership was the decimation of industry caused by the Conservative Government. Between 1979 and 1994, the proportion of people employed in manufacturing industry fell from 31 to 20 per cent. People were displaced not because of trade union legislation, but because of the Conservative Government's policies.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman is being somewhat disingenuous. As I understand it, trade union membership has fallen since 1979 by approximately 6 million, yet unemployment never rose much above 3 million or, at worst, 3.5 million—it is currently under 2 million—so I do not see how he can link those figures. Does he agree that people do not want to be members of trade unions in the way they used to, because times have changed? People certainly do not want membership to be compulsory.

Mr. Clapham: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, trade union membership is well above 6 million. I accept that there has been a considerable fall, but, as I said, that was caused by unemployment. He said that, under Mrs. Thatcher's Government, unemployment was 3 million. Because of the way in which unemployment was hidden at that time, the actual figure was well above 5 million. The hon. Gentleman knows that as well as I do.

There is no evidence to suggest that individualism has taken over from organisation in trade unions. From 1987, 40 per cent. of the factories that derecognised trade unions did not put in place any alternative mechanism for communicating with the workers, who have been made that much worse off.

The Tory Government's attitude resulted in companies derecognising. The evidence shows clearly that that created bad management. Workplaces were managed in a way that had a detrimental impact on the economy and was unhelpful to the people on the shop floor.

Bad management leads to bad health and safety; the figures show that 1.6 million people are injured in industry each year. It is estimated that 2 million people are exposed to conditions that make their health worse. The cost is enormous: about 30 million working days a year are lost through poor health and safety, and the cost to the economy is estimated to be between £15 billion and £18 billion.

One of the major benefits of recognition will be the extension of the appointment of safety representatives under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. Hon. Members may be aware that there is a statutory obligation on the employer, where there is a recognised trade union, to set up a safety committee, through which the safety representative can work to ensure that the workplace is made much safer.

Hon. Members have referred to the jobs situation in their various constituencies. Across the Barnsley borough, which contains three constituencies, we need 19,000 jobs merely to bring employment up to the national average. That is because of the massive colliery closure programme that was imposed on the area with no thought whatever for the future.

The local authority, with help from the Labour Government, is working hard to overcome the enormous obstacles that we have to face in the local economy.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I have no prejudice against trade unions: my grandfather was a shop steward and my father was a union member all his life. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the Government's support for the coalfield communities. I am a former Nottinghamshire county councillor, and I know that the shire county rate support grant received by counties such as Nottingham was extremely poor. The money was channelled into urban areas, and not into coalfield communities.

Mr. Clapham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to *The Guardian* this morning. He will note that the Government are prepared and determined to do something for the coal industry, which the previous Tory Government were not. He should take cognisance of reports in the press this morning.

Because of the general depression in the local economy, wages in the Barnsley borough are only 50 per cent. of the national average. When I met some young people recently, a young woman told me that she was working at a Barnsley factory for £2.80 an hour; that she was forced to work a 12-hour day, because if she refused to work beyond eight hours she would lose her job; that she was not paid overtime; and that, when her first eight hours finished, she was bussed to another factory to complete the latter part of the 12-hour shift.

From what Conservative Members have said, I take it that they would be in favour of such a system and of wages of £2.80 an hour. The situation needs to be remedied, and that will happen only if unions are recognised and can negotiate the best possible wages and conditions for those on the shop floor. In such negotiations, they can move the employer on to partnership by consent. Partnership is better for everyone.

The evidence from my constituency shows clearly that 18 years of Toryism returned us to the Victorian age. The Government are determined to move us on, and trade union recognition is one way of returning empowerment and giving people a greater say, so that they can work in better conditions.

The 15 countries in the European Union all recognise trade unions in one way or another. The three Scandinavian countries—Sweden, Denmark and Finland—have had the kind of trade union recognition that we are discussing in situ for many years, and it is working well.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman has just conceded that he would like to return to a pre-1979 position. From 1979, there was a consistent reduction in the number of days lost through strikes, and, by 1996, almost 28 million working days were saved. Does he concede that compulsory union recognition, which he favours, will create a persistent and substantial increase in the number of days lost in British workplaces?

Mr. Clapham: Had the hon. Gentleman been listening, he would have known that I was advocating not a return to pre-1979 but trade unionism in the modern age, which will give people the representation that they need to have a say in their workplace, leading to consent and partnership.

There has been a long dialogue about the formula between the TUC and the CBI, but they have been unable to bridge the gulf. If the formula proposed by the CBI were accepted, it would lead to an industrial relations crisis. The only formula that would work safely is 50 per cent. plus one, which would result in trade unions being recognised in an orderly way.

Mr. Collins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clapham: Not at this time, as I have not finished making the point. I want to explain why anything less than a 50 per cent. plus one formula would lead to crisis. The first time that the inevitable confrontation between employers and employees occurred, the employer would say that the conciliation and consultation procedures under which the trade union was prosecuting its claim no longer applied, because they had not been validated under the new rules. The result would be that employers would start to unravel the conciliation and consultation procedures. In some circumstances, it could lead to national, regional and local bargaining procedures being unravelled. That would be to the detriment not only of trade unions but of businesses.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Gentleman puts a most sincere and eloquent case against the CBI position. May I take it that, if his Government embraced the CBI position, he would vote against them?

Mr. Clapham: I believe that the TUC position is based on reason and fairness.

Trade unions are as relevant today as they ever were, because workers are as vulnerable as they ever were. The way to deal with that vulnerability is through trade union recognition. The way to implement that is via the TUC formula.

6.30 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): This has been a revealing debate, opened by the honourable and socialist Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). In his characteristic way, after getting unsteadily into the air, he slipped the controls into auto-rant, and stayed there until he finished; so much so that, when he was asked the central question about whether the Government would adopt the position of the TUC or of the CBI, which are incompatible, he described it as a silly question. Some of his colleagues have definite views on it, but he could not answer it. If he has put his controls on autopilot, I hope that they do not fall foul of the millennium bug. It may be triggered well before the millennium, because even this Government will have to make a decision before then.

We had solid, thoughtful contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley), for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). They pointed out some of the historic record, and some of the constraints on this area of industrial relations. We had an interesting contribution from the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) about the experience of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service in picking up the pieces after the last episode of statutory recognition of unions.

We had some most revealing contributions from Labour Members. They may deny it if they wish, but the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) took the TUC's part, and the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) did so explicitly. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) leaned that way, and the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) was a bit that way inclined. Given the present state of the Labour party, I cannot help feeling that the situation is like that shown by the opinion poll once carried out in the staffroom of a well-known school. Twelve male teachers denied wearing long johns, three admitted it, and three did not know.

If Labour Members were not mindful of the Speaker's views on audible pagers, the air would have been thick with wireless messages bringing them back on message. If we had the compression of time that is a characteristic of the theatre, and this was a play, it would be now that we got the final revelation: a pager message vibrating across the thighs of Labour Members saying, "Jump TUC" or "Jump CBI". Then we would know.

This is a defining moment for the Government. Sources as varied as Peter Riddell of *The Times* and Bill Morris of the T and G have made that clear. As

"a Minister who still hopes Blair will shift"

is quoted as saying in the *New Statesman*:

"It would be a defining moment that sent out ripples and echoes for a very long time in all sorts of unpredictable ways."

In the preceding paragraph,

"a union leader with impeccable new Labour credentials"

is quoted as threatening:

"We would go into internal opposition."

Let me repeat in full Labour's election's pledge:

"People should be free to join or not to join a union. Where they do decide to join, and where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised. This promotes stable and orderly industrial relations. There will be full consultation on the most effective means of implementing this proposal."

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

It could hardly be clearer. It was clear to John Edmonds, Bill Morris and John Monks. However, last week, in reply to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), the Prime Minister said that he was consulting not on the means of implementation but on the meaning of his pledge. He finds preaching easy but decision making distressing. We concede that consultation is a good idea, but we begin to doubt whether we can get from the Prime Minister the time of day or the day of the week without still more consultation and delay, and no doubt the employment of yet more expensive focus groups.

Mr. Sutcliffe: On consultation, did the hon. Gentleman consult the CBI about this debate, and if so, what was its view on whether it would be helpful?

Mr. Boswell: I took advice from a variety of sources on that matter. It would be useful for the House, which makes decisions on legislation, to be told the Government's position. The hon. Gentleman may be ahead of me, but we seek to find out the truth.

The truth is that, if the Prime Minister ever found the time, or had the inclination, to come here, he would find staked out waiting for him, all wanting their pound of flesh, a group of Cabinet Ministers. Yesterday's newspapers reported it as including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and the President of the Board of Trade, who has not returned for the winding-up speeches; doubtless she hovers. It also includes the Secretaries of State for Health and for Culture, Media and Sport and, bless me, the Deputy Prime Minister.

There is also a concatenation of the newer intake. I strain my eyes to see the hon. Members for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), who were all fingered in the Sunday newspapers. The hon. Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) was here for most of the debate as a silent onlooker.

The truth is that, in its manifesto, Labour tried, in this as in many other matters, to be all things to all people. It consciously adopted a studied form of ambiguity, but cannot sustain it, even if it means that it has to give up some of its new-found friends or its old ones. Labour likes preaching at us. It is full of new puritanism, but it must know that its sins will catch it out. The day of judgment is fast approaching.

Meanwhile, No. 10 goes on with its ridiculous, unattributable waffle, trying to split the difference. A source close to the Prime Minister is reported as saying:

"Both sides of industry will be disappointed. Neither will get what it wants. But it will be a new Labour solution, not an old Labour one."

Conservative Members are not disposed to back any solution to Labour's little local difficulties. Our motion was tabled in the interests of finding out what Labour thought it meant, thus providing a service to freedom of information. We are, sadly, little wiser, but we know that, if it is forced to decide—and it will be—it has a clear choice between 100 years of Labour history or upsetting its new associates in the business community. More likely, it will have to try to broker a sordid compromise, described so characteristically and aptly as a "new Labour solution".

The House must remember that any compromise brings its own problems. As the TUC pointed out, in a work force of 100, if there is a minimum turnout requirement of 60 per cent. and a vote of 58 to one in favour, it will not count. If it is 31 to 29, it will. That is the situation that we will get into.

Possibly in an effort to put us off our stroke, one or two hon. Members started to raise matters of interest, so I can disclose to the House that I am the employer of one employee. There is no specific exclusion in the Labour manifesto for single employees.

I have not the faintest idea whether my employee is a member of a union, but those circumstances would provide a perfect opportunity for Labour's policy, because it would be possible to know whether one constituted a majority and whether the whole of the relevant work force was balloted on the matter. I mention that as an absurdity, because the view from the Conservative Benches is that it is far better not to go down that road at all.

Let us not imagine that the practical problems end there. As the Engineering Employers Federation has indicated, for a start many people join a union for the specific purpose of getting insured. We are familiar with that from the teachers' unions, but there are other examples. Are those people, willy-nilly, to have their bargaining rights fully collectivised? Are they to find that they have, in effect, joined a closed shop without being asked? Would an individual be able to make his own contract with his employer, or would such a contract be nullified? Would employers be able to communicate with the work force outwith the collective bargaining process?

There may also be difficulties where multiple unions are recognised, which would bear closely on the definition of the relevant work force. Different parts of an organisation might vote for different unions, and so take us back to the uncomfortable but familiar days of demarcation disputes and unnecessary industrial disputes. Who is to draw up the definition of the "relevant" part of the work force?

A pledge that Labour tried to pretend was clear was in fact intended to be a masterpiece of ambiguity—I forget who it was who said that there were six different sorts of ambiguity, but no doubt one of my literary friends will remind me—and it is extremely difficult to implement.

Mr. Robathan: I hate to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I do not know about the six sorts of ambiguity, although there is one specific sort of ambiguity about which I want to know. Does my hon. Friend believe that those who criticised Rupert Murdoch's behaviour at Wapping in the early 1980s will criticise such behaviour today, given that Rupert Murdoch is, metaphorically speaking, in bed with the Prime Minister and the Labour party?

Mr. Boswell: The short answer to that is that it all depends on the pager message they receive.

The Government amendment is particularly revealing, in that it makes it clear that they regard the matter as a sort of partnership agenda. There has been lots of touchy-feeliness and niceness emerging, which would not sit very well in the world of Jack Dash and Red Robbo.

However, Labour's idea of industrial partnership has about as much relevance to real industrial partnership as people's democracy had to its real equivalent—a forced partnership is no partnership at all.

The CBI, in the shape of Adair Turner, has called for a real partnership. I would welcome that, just as I have no problem with the concept of trade union membership. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) may be interested in this point, because it may have been in the back of her mind when she spoke.

Only this weekend, *The Observer* drew attention in a positive way to the health and safety record of certain companies where there was recognition, and there is probably some evidence of that sort of positive achievement. However, if it is in the real interests of employers to recognise unions, why do they not recognise them anyway? Why should employers be forced by law to recognise unions? When one brings law into all such areas, the danger is that it will merely reignite the industrial relations problems we had hoped were long behind us.

Maria Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House who brought law into industrial relations in this country?

Mr. Boswell: It was not, of course, a Conservative Government. The immunities go back to 1909, and the problem has always been to find the right balance.

It is well known that the number of strikes today is less than 10 per cent. of the figure characteristic of the 1970s. ACAS has just published a good report on industrial relations for the year. However, the strains are already being felt: for example, last week we had irregular action in the postal service and the London Underground, and there was a walkout after a suspension at my local Ford plant. There is real pressure on certain industrial sectors, and it is vital that we do not throw away our competitive strengths. The danger is that the effect of the Government's policy will be to sling another rock at British industry, at a time when it can least afford it.

The Labour manifesto spoke of

"stable and orderly industrial relations."

However, the danger is well set out by the director-general of the Institute of Personnel Development, who says:

"This is a very good illustration of the sort of irreconcilable nonsense that arises from statutory trade union recognition. The obligation becomes a source of conflict in itself."

Our motion probes the Government's intentions, because we fear that they will not deliver stability. We believe that their policies caricature industrial partnership and disturb a delicate industrial balance. At their heart is an ambiguity which the Government know exists, but they cannot go on for ever on the basis of, "Don't ask, don't tell." They will have to stand up and be counted, and Labour Back Benchers could make a contribution by joining us in the Lobby tonight.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): This has been an interesting debate and a revealing one, because it has said a great deal about today's Conservative party. What it shows is the reason why they are still yesterday's Conservative party, and will remain so. Although the debate has been interesting, it obviously has not been interesting enough to attract Conservative Members to the Chamber on their own Opposition day. At one point during the opening speeches, there were about 14 Opposition Members present. I know that the number of Conservative Members is small, but I had not realised that they were so small or so pathetic.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, the Government will produce proposals on union recognition in the first half of this year. Of course, important decisions are to be taken on the details of those proposals, and we are actively engaged in discussions on those issues with both the CBI and the TUC.

There have been two strands to the debate: there are those hon. Members, especially on the Labour Benches, who wish to engage in a genuine debate about the future direction of policy, and we have heard thoughtful and valuable contributions on the balance to be struck between rights and responsibilities of employees and employees, and descriptions of modern business and modern trade unionism.

In that strand, there is a common realisation that the existing balance—or, more precisely, the balance as at 1 May last year—is inadequate. It palpably fails to provide fairness; it fails to deliver a sense of security and mutual trust in the workplace; it also fails to encourage workers to see themselves as partners with employers in pursuit of common business objectives.

That is what this subject is all about—building competitiveness, and an economy in which we can all share. We want to establish a new era of employment relations in this country. We want to break with the past, both from the time when workers and management were constantly at loggerheads, and from the more recent period when many workers have been denied decent standards at work. Our approach is truly a third way. It is designed to achieve flexibility with fairness, enhanced competitiveness with more security, and greater productivity through partnership.

Mr. Lansley: In the absence of a formed Government policy on union recognition, and instead of waiting for a White Paper and talking to the CBI and the TUC, why do the Government not publish a Green Paper and have a wider consultation with industry more generally?

Mrs. Roche: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I honestly fail to do so. In our manifesto, we said that we would consult. What sticks in the Conservatives' craw is that the Labour Government really do consult with industry—we consult with unions and with management. I remind Conservative Members that that is what we said in our manifesto we would do, it is what the British people elected us to do and it is what we shall do, and we shall not be diverted from it.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Lady was right to say that that was in the Labour party manifesto. Will she now tell the House, without consulting or conferring, what it means? We want a simple answer.

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not want consultation. Conservative Members like the old days—they like remembering divisions in industry. They cannot stand the fact that we have consulted the CBI

[Mrs. Roche]

and the TUC, which have got together to produce joint documents. It sticks in their craw. They will have to wait for the White Paper and until we have listened to what both sides have to say.

Not for the first time, Conservative Members simply refuse to move with the times. They are in a state of denial. They cannot bear to think of the election result, or to adjust their thinking. They fail to grasp the fact that modern companies need to work in collaboration and partnership with their employees. Managing people by threat or diktat does not produce efficient or profitable business. The intervention and speech of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) are good examples of that.

As my hon. Friends said time and again, our leading firms fully grasp that point. Unlike the Conservative party, most companies already recognise unions and value the importance of establishing constructive, collective relationships with their work forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) rightly referred to the recent NOP survey on behalf of the consultancy People in Business, which found that 67 per cent. of managers in top companies thought that good collective relationships were "important" or "very important" in implementing change at the workplace. That is an important message, but Conservative Members could not care less. They want to return to the past instead of looking to the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) said, we want partnership rather than an adversarial relationship. The TUC and the CBI are working together to achieve that. It is all about progressive businesses and modern companies with modern trade unions.

Our task is to spread good practice beyond the leading companies, and we know that much remains to be done. We need to ensure that as many companies as possible take that message on board. If we believed Conservative Members, we would think that all was well in the best possible world, and that everything could continue as before. We would think that we had nothing to learn and did not need to progress. We reject that.

Mr. Collins: The Minister says that the Government's task is to spread the word beyond the leading firms. Is she in favour of a minimum number of employees, above which recognition proposals would apply and below which they would not apply? If so, what would the number be?

Mrs. Roche: Although the hon. Gentleman has been present throughout the debate, he clearly did not listen to the Minister of State's opening speech. We are listening and consulting, and we shall introduce our proposals in the White Paper in our time, not in the hon. Gentleman's.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I must make progress, but, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) is my pair, I always give way to her.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I, too, am conscious of the relationship between us, so I shall be careful what I say. The Minister referred again to consultation. When she stood on the Labour party manifesto in last year's election, what did she understand was the definition of "the majority of the work force"?

Mrs. Roche: I appreciate the courtesy with which the hon. Lady has framed her question. I understood from the manifesto, on which my hon. Friends and I stood and on which we were successful, that we would carry out a consultation exercise and then make proposals—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may not like that. They cannot stand the fact that we are not only consulting but listening. They left us with a fractured legacy, and we shall ensure that we deal with it.

It is asserted that workers do not need or want union recognition, but prefer to deal with their employers on an individual basis. We know that that is incorrect. According to the latest British social attitudes survey, 46 per cent. of workers feel that they should have more say at work, 62 per cent. think that management always try to get the better of employees, and 63 per cent. feel that they have little or no influence over decisions that directly affect their work. *[Interruption.]*

Opposition Members think that that is amusing. They think that it is great for the state of British industry. It is fine for them to be complacent, but the Government want to change things, so that every worker feels involved in the company that he or she represents, and so that management and unions can progress together to help the productiveness of our economy.

This afternoon, we heard speeches that took us back in time. The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) was the authentic voice of the Tory Opposition. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that my analysis is correct, and that the hon. Gentleman is isolated. If his really is the voice of the Tory party, this Government are in power for a very long time.

Dr. Julian Lewis: The Minister thinks that I am going to respond to her facile remark, but I am not. I wish to raise a serious point. Will she answer the question posed repeatedly in my speech: can the Government guarantee that, whatever figures they finally light upon in terms of the number of people who must vote for recognition to be made mandatory, the vote will be conducted by a tamper-proof, secret postal ballot? Yes or no?

Mrs. Roche: I should caution the hon. Gentleman to be a little more patient. I assure him that recognition ballots, like industrial action ballots, will be fairly conducted and subject to independent scrutiny. That has come about because of the joint work between the CBI and the TUC. Conservative Members may knock it, but we recognise that it is productive and extremely useful.

Our proposals will reduce the scope for disputes over recognition. At present, unions have only two options if an employer refuses to recognise them: they can give in, or they can take industrial action. A statutory recognition procedure provides a potent alternative for both unions and employers to test the support for recognition, and to resolve disputes without industrial action.

I was a little disappointed by the speech of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), because he seemed to suggest that we were wrong to ask the TUC and the CBI to discuss those issues bilaterally. I thought that that was what the Liberal Democrats stood for, and that they were keen on industrial partnership. The Government believe in partnership, and want to deliver our policy in conjunction with all interested parties.

The Government have listened closely to the views expressed in today's debate, and we shall reflect carefully on what has been said. The White Paper's aim is to present a package of measures that will guarantee decent minimum standards at work. The standards must be sensible, realistic and fair to both employees and employers.

Our proposals on fairness therefore need to be clear, and as simple as possible to implement. We must end the situation in which employers can ignore the wishes of their work force by denying recognition, even though most of their employees clearly want it. At the moment, the power to determine whether recognition is granted rests solely with employers. Workers have no rights or say in the matter. Those arrangements cannot continue.

There are solid democratic arguments in favour of establishing a recognition right. As my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley, West and Penistone and for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said, it also makes good economic sense. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone spoke about health and safety issues as well.

How can commitment and flexibility be encouraged, when employers ignore the views of their employees on such a fundamental issue as establishing a collective voice at work? Clearly we need to move on, and ensure that we progress.

We have already done much in our first year in office to create a more just system of employment relations. We are close to enacting the National Minimum Wage Bill. We have signed the social chapter, and are about to set out our proposals for implementing the working time and young workers directives. The forthcoming White Paper on fairness at work will contain our proposals for completing the process.

Every one of these proposals is resisted by Opposition Members, who have nothing to offer the future. They are stuck firmly in the past, in an age of distrust, insecurity and conflict at work. They talk about the need for businesses to work more flexibly, but, as this revealing debate has shown, it is they and their thinking that are inflexible and outdated.

Our objective is to create a new and modern system of employment relations in this country—a system in which fairness can truly be combined with flexibility and efficiency; a system that actively encourages a greater sense of trust and partnership in the workplace.

I urge the House to support the amendment standing in the name of my right hon. Friends.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 316.

Division No. 244] **[7.1 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and Sir David Madel.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon

Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government for acting quickly and effectively to redress the damaging culture of low pay, job insecurity and the sweatshop economy inherited from the previous Government by adopting a partnership approach to set decent minimum standards for all workers; notes that good standards at work are essential for competitiveness and business success and that the Government has, as part of its strategy for ensuring decent minimum standards and labour market flexibility, involved employers' and workers' representatives on the Low Pay Commission and in discussions on trade union recognition, and in addition has restored union rights at GCHQ, signed the European Social Chapter and made rapid progress on the National Minimum Wage Bill; and further notes that the Government is also committed, as part of that strategy, which enjoys wide support, to implementing the Directives on Working Time, Young Workers, European Works Councils and Part-Time Work, and to fulfilling the Government's commitment to enable workers to enjoy union recognition where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them.

Manufacturing Industry

7.14 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must tell the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment tabled in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I beg to move,

That this House notes the TUC forecast of 200,000 job losses in manufacturing resulting from this Government's economic policies, the fact that so many manufacturers have to make representations about export and trading problems, the absence of a stable and competitive exchange rate, the damage done by tax increases imposed on business and the forthcoming wage and labour relations problems coming from the Government's social and labour law agenda; and urges the Government to put the interests of manufacturing business higher up its agenda, changing policies before factories close and jobs are lost.

It gives me pleasure to speak to the Opposition motion, and to oppose the Government amendment.

Labour's policy is hurting, but it is not working. Manufacturing is being gravely damaged. Exporters are losing orders; industry is teetering on the edge of recession. Every day brings more bad news. Today's industrial output figures show a further drop in activity. ICI has forecast a £120 million profit collapse, thanks to the level of sterling. Vickers is experiencing difficulties in obtaining repeat export orders, thanks to the level of the pound. Royal Doulton has announced 330 job losses, and has blamed the exchange rate. British Steel has said that 10,000 jobs must go owing to the state of the currency. Last week, one of the nation's big caravan companies, ABI, went into receivership, blaming the impact of the pound.

Only a few weeks ago, the President of the Board of Trade went to the caravan exhibition. She told exhibitors there that she was their champion. Some champion! She should have noticed during her visit that Labour's policies for business were damaging. She should have found out that those people did not want all the extra taxes. She should have discovered that sterling was crippling their exports. She has done nothing about the problem, and today she owes the industry an apology and the House an explanation.

The President of the Board of Trade should explain why she has remained silent throughout the first stages of an industrial collapse, and she should tell us what she intends to do about the high level of the pound. I see that the right hon. Lady is frowning. I wonder whether she frowns because she is completely ignorant of the state of British manufacturing industry, or because she does not know what to do about it. It is no good exuding tea and sympathy, as some new Labour variant of beer and sandwiches. Industry expects the President of the Board of Trade to come up with some answers.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is probably frowning at the cheapjack motion that we are discussing. Twenty years ago, under a Labour Government, 3.6 per cent. of gross domestic product was invested in plant and machinery—in industry. When the Conservatives left office last year, the figure was down to 2.6 per cent. Before that, it had been consistently hovering just above 2 per cent.—lower than the figure in any other industrial

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

nation. What does the right hon. Gentleman say about that record of 20 years of failing to help British manufacturing investment?

Mr. Redwood: During our 18 years in office, we gave manufacturing much more encouragement than the present Government have during the past 10 months. We did not tax manufacturing as this Government are; we did not try to wreck manufacturing by introducing an independent Bank of England, and fiscal policies of the kind introduced by this Government. The hon. Gentleman would be well advised to listen to manufacturers in his constituency, and to speak up for them in the House rather than accepting the brief on the pager and making foolish interventions.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): As the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned the Bank of England, perhaps he will tell us whether he thinks that the present Government's policy of independence would be reversed if there were ever another Tory Government.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman may wish to note that the legislation concerned has not yet gone through the House, and that we oppose it. Indeed, the Chancellor has jumped the gun: he went ahead with the policy without notifying the House in the first instance, and then, having notified the House, went ahead without the necessary legal backing—backing that he is seeking. The Conservative party opposes that legislation.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, many foolish measures are going through the House, and many more may do so over the next couple of years. My right hon. Friends and I will decide which we can and should repeal when we get nearer to the time to write our manifesto. We may well be able to surprise the hon. Gentleman by giving him the answer that he thinks I cannot give tonight, but he must accept that it would be foolish for us to say at this stage what measures we shall repeal when so many more measures are likely to be presented by the Government.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Did my right hon. Friend see the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget Red Book forecast that the rate of increase of business investment is set to halve between 1997 and 1999?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes an extremely powerful point, to which I was coming. Of course investment is forecast to plummet under this Government, just as savings are going down. They are hitting savings and investment—the two usually go together—which is the opposite of what they said before the election they would achieve. Labour Members look so glum because they know that the Government are delivering exactly the opposite of the fine words that they offered industry in the run-up to the general election. Does the Secretary of State want to go down in history as a Labour Secretary of State who presided over factory closures, more short-time working and more job losses? That is what the TUC is predicting, let alone independent forecasters or Her Majesty's Opposition.

In the 1980s, a leading Labour commentator said:

"The problems of our manufacturing industries remain, and in these circumstances can only get worse".

He added:

"it is our ability to produce manufactured goods and to compete in our own and in world markets that is central to our industrial and economic performance."

Those words are quite right today, and I wish that they would be repeated—they were written by the commentator-turned-Chancellor who is now at No. 11 Downing street.

Will the Secretary of State remind the Chancellor of his fine words in opposition about how important manufacturing is to our economy? Will she find the strength, at least in the privacy of Government, to condemn the lethal combination of the past two Budgets and the independence of the Bank of England, which is forcing adjustment and the policy against inflation on to manufacturers? They will have to slim down or close down.

Before the election, the Prime Minister agreed with the Chancellor, but that was a long time ago, and we know that they have since bickered and fallen out. Before the election, the Prime Minister said:

"Britain won't live by services alone. It needs a manufacturing base".

After the election, the Prime Minister—a rare visitor to the House—has done nothing to help manufacturing. He is deaf to the pleas of manufacturers about huge tax increases, about the level of sterling and about their having to close factories and go on to short time because of the export position.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I am a little puzzled by the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. He appears to be arguing simultaneously that taxes should go down to help industry and go up to help the pound. Which does he favour?

Mr. Redwood: It is a complete fiction for Labour Members to say that Conservative Members believe that taxes must go up. We believe that savings must go up. The way in which to promote savings is to cut taxes on them instead of putting more and more taxes on savers. That huge error of the past two Budgets was underwritten by the Chancellor's error in taking money out of the tills and cash registers of businesses.

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that he wants to cut taxes on saving and increase borrowing?

Mr. Redwood: I am saying that the economy would be much healthier if taxes on saving were cut and the tax breaks that we left the Government were restored. More natural tax revenue would come in without the increase in rates, which the Government have wrongly imposed. Higher tax rates are necessary if enough manufacturing is killed, which is what the Government are doing, because a generator of additional tax revenue is being destroyed. They are distorting the economy against their interests and against those of the nation.

Labour Members always make two replies when Conservative Members stick up for manufacturers.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what he is about to say, and he can think of something else.

Labour Members tell us that we have no right to stick up for manufacturers because some businesses were damaged and jobs were lost in 1991 and 1992.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: I shall make this point and then give way, as I always do.

Labour Members are right to say that mistakes were made in that period, and that damage was done. The Conservative party has apologised for those mistakes; more important, we have learnt from them.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): When?

Mr. Redwood: The Leader of the Opposition made a fulsome apology for the exchange rate mechanism difficulties, from which the Conservative Government and this Government should have learnt. Unfortunately, this Government have not learnt from that experience, and have amnesia about the early 1990s. Over the Conservative years, that was the only time that I remember the Labour Opposition supporting the economic policies of the day. Why do not Labour Members apologise and show that they have learnt something from the experience? They are foolish to keep highlighting it.

Dr. George Turner: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman publicly apologised for the industrial scars that he left in my constituency—factories in King's Lynn closed and have still not reopened. Does he recognise that, under this Government, we are experiencing the smack of a firm Chancellor who is determined that interest rates will not go to 15 per cent. and that saving rates will not go down to 6 per cent., which are the figures over which the right hon. Gentleman presided?

Mr. Redwood: That is a helpful intervention, because it illustrates the point: mistakes were made in the early 1990s and many factories have not reopened, which is why we say to the Government, "Don't let it happen again." Do the Government at least have the decency to accept that they fully supported those policies and have still not apologised or implied that they have learnt anything from that experience?

Fiona Mactaggart: I find it odd that the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that what happened in the early 1990s was a tiny blip. Between the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 and the election of the Labour Government, manufacturing industry in Slough did not decline by only 5 or 10 per cent. By the time that I was elected, manufacturing industry in the town was a third of what it had been. That is the Tory legacy. Let us not pretend that there was a little blip at the beginning of the 1990s; there was devastation, and many people in towns such as Slough lost their livelihoods as a result.

Mr. Redwood: There were enormously successful economic conditions throughout most of the 1980s and after we came out of the exchange rate mechanism. In the Conservative years, the motor industry was restored to some of its former glory after the devastation of the 1970s and the Labour Government. The figures that the hon. Lady produces for Slough are incredible. I know Slough fairly well; there was not a two-thirds decline in manufacturing activity over the Tory years. She should visit it more often; if she did so, she would realise that a large number of successful new-generation businesses came to the town and created considerable prosperity.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): The right hon. Gentleman knows from the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who is sitting close by him, that Loughborough suffered throughout the 1980s. I can give him the job figures: a brush factory employed 6,500 people when the right hon. Member for Charnwood was elected in Loughborough in 1979. It was the largest employer in the town, but it now employs only 2,500 people. That is what happened in the 1980s, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will apologise to every one of those people who lost their jobs, whom I meet regularly on their doorsteps because I live in the constituency.

Mr. Redwood: I trust that the hon. Gentleman recognises the great advances made by Conservative policies in new industries such as communications, high technology and computing, which came to this country or grew here in the 1980s and the middle 1990s. We are worried that even some of them, let alone the more traditional industries, are under threat from the Government. Labour Members would be well advised to discuss the present and the future, rather than go over the past, which has been much debated in the House and with the electorate at large.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will the right hon. Gentleman say exactly how many industries closed in that appalling period between 1991 and 1992, and how many thousands of jobs were lost throughout the country? Will he say exactly what job he was doing at that time?

Mr. Redwood: I should be happy to research the answer to those questions after the Labour party has apologised for its part in those events.

The Labour party also says that, in the long term, everything will work out fine. It says that its policy is based on a stable and competitive exchange rate. Do Labour Members not realise that the long term is made up of a series of short terms? Even the fig leaf of their policy is blown away in the foreign exchange hurricanes that have been raging.

The President of the Board of Trade owes business a new policy. Are the Government out to create a stable currency at this very high level, which business thinks is uncompetitive, or are they out to create a competitive currency, which in the eyes of business should be at a lower level? She must concede that the Government cannot have a stable and competitive currency. Why do the right hon. Lady, the Chancellor and all those on the pager service keep mouthing this nonsense about having a stable and competitive exchange rate, when it is clearly unstable and uncompetitive?

Let us consider how unstable the currency has been. Since Labour came into office, the pound has risen 9 per cent. against the French franc, 10 per cent. against the

[Mr. Redwood]

deutschmark, 20 per cent. against the drachma, 55 per cent. against the Malay dollar and 62 per cent. against the Thai baht. Those are our competitors, and they will undermine our manufacturers.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that 70 per cent. of sterling's appreciation took place under the Conservative Government? Does he recall ever complaining about that at the time?

Mr. Redwood: It is true that sterling rose in the latter months of the Conservative Administration. It is also true that many manufacturers would now like to get back to that level, because they think that that would be a fair level for their businesses. What I am talking about, and what the hon. Lady should be concentrating on, is the huge increase in the value of the pound against certain Asian currencies and the substantial increase against continental currencies since Labour came to office. If Labour Members do not know that that has happened, heaven help this country. They should read the financial pages and understand the difficulties that the high rate of sterling is creating.

Labour Members may think that the good news is that we can take cheaper foreign holidays, which is true. However, the bad news will be counted by every British leisure business in fewer foreign visitors, and by every exporter in fewer foreign orders.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): If the right hon. Gentleman were in government, what would he do about the yen, which has reached a six-and-a-half-year low? Does he deny that the value of sterling is linked to the Asian economies, the yen, the prospects for the euro and the recession in Europe? Is he in the isolationist world of fish-and-chip-shop Britain?

Mr. Redwood: I do not know where the fish and chips came from, but we are some way from enjoying them tonight, as there is much debating to be done. The Opposition believe that the problem of Japan should be handled by Governments collectively working through international bodies. We would support any sensible measures that the Government proposed in that connection. I shall come to the problems of euroland, because they are relevant to the present position.

Why is the pound so strong? The Governor of the Bank of England has warned that fears of a weak euro are partly to blame. He is right. The Leader of the Opposition has pointed out that a fudged euro does not help. He is obviously right. People around the world who are looking for a good investment are worried that the new euro may be weak or may be strained by the failure of Europe to keep to the requirements of the Maastricht treaty.

The Prime Minister has made two contradictory statements about this crucial issue. He has said that the euro must not be fudged. The Opposition agree with that proposition. He has also told us that Britain cannot object to all 11 candidates going ahead in the first wave, yet most of them can do so only with a liberal helping of fudge. Will the President of the Board of Trade clear up that confusion? Does she agree with the Prime Minister that a weak and fudged euro makes sterling more attractive, and of itself adds to the misery of British industry? Does she agree that a lot of fudge is required to pretend that Italy and Belgium, which have both borrowed more than twice the limits permitted in the treaty, have qualified for the single currency? Will she persuade the Prime Minister to do something about that when he goes to important meetings to settle these issues?

Is the President of the Board of Trade aware that the 15 European Community countries have borrowed £660 billion more than is permitted under the Maastricht treaty? That does not include Britain, because it is below the reference level. Has she any idea how the member states that want to go ahead with currency union will repay £660 billion in the next couple of years in order to qualify, or does she think that the treaty requirements do not matter?

Does the President of the Board of Trade agree that, as Sweden is ruled out because it has not belonged to the exchange rate mechanism for two years, Britain is ruled out for the same reason? What do the Government intend to do about Britain's membership of the exchange rate mechanism? Will she explain how Ireland qualifies, given that its currency has been too strong for the exchange rate mechanism and has recently had to be revalued? Is that not fudge in the prime ministerial sense of that word? If not, what would be fudge? Perhaps the right hon. Lady will take us into the Government's sweet shop and tell us.

How do the Government intend to influence Europe for the better, as they believe that expressing any different opinion from the rest will, in the Prime Minister's words, cause "mayhem"? The truth is that the Prime Minister will wield no influence whatever over decisions on the single currency.

Yvette Cooper: Does the right hon. Gentleman's concern about the single currency mean that he has now abandoned the position, as set out in his book, that the role of Britain should be to try to derail the system and to ruin the single currency before it starts? If so, should we expect a further softening of his position on the single currency in the future?

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted that the hon. Lady wishes to give my book the publicity of the *Hansard* record: it is very gracious of her. If she looks at the date of that book, she will see that it was addressed to the Conservative Government at a much earlier stage in the development of this scheme. It was good advice for those days, given where we then were. I shall explain shortly the advice of Her Majesty's Opposition in the new circumstances, and I hope that she will be patient, because I shall tell her what she wants to know.

According to the Prime Minister, we have the prospect of mayhem if we try to influence matters, but he has also said that he does not like fudge. It has, in effect, already been decided that 11 countries will go ahead with liberal helpings of fudge. That is against the Government's stated policy, it is against Britain's interests and it is against Europe's interests, yet the Prime Minister thinks that he can do nothing. He will do nothing and he admits that he will have no influence. What a tragedy for Europe and for our country.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): It has taken the right hon. Gentleman nine minutes to get on to his

favourite theme of Europhobia, which is miles away from the motion on the Order Paper. As he is in the mood for apologies, will he take the opportunity to apologise for the gratuitous and unpleasant insult he offered to Chancellor Kohl, on whom the business men of Britain conferred the freedom of the City of London? Is the right hon. Gentleman capable of saying sorry in any language for that insult?

Mr. Redwood: I offered no insult to Chancellor Kohl, so I have no need to apologise. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) clearly does not like the fact that his Prime Minister is isolated at the Euro X meeting. The Prime Minister will be isolated in his indecision over this matter: he will be isolated by his prevarication and British industry will suffer as a result. That is central to the debate, but the hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand the argument. The Governor of the Bank of England has warned that a fudged euro is one of the pressures leading to a strong pound. Surely the Prime Minister should want to sort that out by taking the fudge out of the euro and helping to relieve some of the pressure on sterling.

Why will not the Prime Minister warn Europe that fudging will cause damage, as the German central bank has done? Why will he not go to the meeting and say that only those countries that meet all the requirements can be allowed in? He could congratulate Luxembourg and Finland: I am sure that they would be very happy together. Has he read the Commission's convergence report, which is a devastating document that finds problems in the case of all the other member states?

Of Italy, the Commission says:

"There must be an ongoing concern as to whether the ratio of government debt to GDP will be 'sufficiently diminishing and approaching the reference level at a satisfactory pace' and whether the sustainability of the fiscal position has been achieved."

In other words, Italy does not meet the requirements. Similar words are used of Belgium. The Commission states:

"the debt to GDP ratio is far above the 60 per cent. reference level."

Going along with a mechanism that one cannot bring oneself to join without explaining one's reservations is not impressive or statesmanlike, and it is certainly not heroic. It is weak and pathetic, and it leaves Europe to fudge. My argument is certainly in order, because part of the strength of sterling relates to the lack of Government policy on the issue of the single currency.

At a time when British manufacturing is on the rack, business is offered lectures by the President of the Board of Trade on how it should do better. The Foreign Office offers business an exhibition of how cool Britannia is or should be. The odd bouncy castle in Whitehall will not win back the lost markets that were destroyed by economic policies. I do not mind watching middle-aged men trying earnestly to re-create their youth, but I object to Ministers trying to do it at public expense. It is not seemly, and it is not helpful to British business.

Business does not need rebranding by the Government: it needs backing. It does not need subsidies and sympathy: it needs a sensible exchange rate policy, and to get that we need a sensible tax policy that backs savings rather than undermines them. It should not take too much money from manufacturers who need it to invest in the future. There is no point in lecturing business on the need for new products and new investment while taking £25,000 million away from business over the lifetime of this Parliament. It is no good the Government saying that they want business to succeed while taking away the means to do so, and there is no point in saying that there will not be a return to boom and bust when the Chancellor has the distinction of creating boom and bust at the same time.

In July 1997, the Chancellor let the cat out of the bag in one of his Budget texts. He stated:

"There is now an imbalance between strong growth in the consumer and service sector and weak growth in the manufacturing and exporting sector."

All his actions then and since have reinforced that crisis rather than tackling it or making things easier. It is not just the weakness of the fudged Euro-currencies that is causing trouble, because, at home, a hole was dug by the Chancellor when he took business money away and let the consumer spend and spend. He told the Bank of England to sort it all out, but it has its hands tied behind its back.

As usual, Labour Members will doubtless want us to answer the question, "What can be done?" There is a threat of more inflation: that is why the Bank increased the interest rate. I do not blame it for the problem, unlike some of the Chancellor's friends and spin doctors who, when an independent Bank was created, decided that everything that went wrong would be the Bank's fault and everything else would be the joy of the Chancellor.

I liken the Bank's problem to that of someone who is asked to play golf and given only a driver. He will find it an exceedingly difficult game. The Chancellor holds the other clubs, and he has put the player's ball in the bunker. No wonder the Bank is finding it difficult to get the ball out with only a wood. When an economy is as distorted as this one, with services in boom and manufacturing in decline, irons and a putter as well as drivers are needed to get out of trouble and hole the ball. The Chancellor does not seem to understand that, and lets his advisers blame the Bank.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, although about a quarter of exporting manufacturers have had a turndown in orders, they have lower input costs for raw materials? The domestic market is booming, about a third of manufacturers are showing major growth, and employment continues to rocket. Manufacturing is not doing badly at all. After all, there was a trade surplus last year.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is half right. Much of the consumer sector has been booming, but manufacturing is in trouble. He should understand that. Today's industrial output figures and the statements from the companies that I have been citing and others show that exporters are in grave trouble. Asian and continental companies are coming into the home market and undercutting domestic manufacturers who would otherwise be able to sell products in our domestic market.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) quoted some figures. Birmingham is a centre of exporters. Has my right hon. Friend observed that Birmingham chamber of commerce and industry in its announcement of its recent survey results on 1 April

[Mr. Lansley]

stated that not only were exporting companies on the brink of recession, but that the slowdown in the home market for manufacturers was another legacy of the high pound? It stated:

"a third of companies listed overseas competition as being of major concern".

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I did not see that quotation, but it is an effective example for my case.

There are two ways in which to take some heat out of the domestic and service economy without having to put up interest rates and sterling. One way is to tax consumption rather than manufacturing, and the other way is to promote saving. The Opposition support the savings route. We recommend a big savings package from the Chancellor. He should reverse the tax on pension savings. He could increase the interest and the tax-free allowances on national savings. He could make the tax relief on ISAs more generous and encourage an answer to the welfare review that would draw on the Conservative scheme for a second pension based on proper savings. He should sell more long-dated bonds to mop up surplus money, instead of issuing short-dated paper.

Those are positive proposals, which we mean well because we want to see our country and our manufacturers do well. Labour Members would be wise to listen carefully to our sensible proposals. The Chancellor should tell the markets that he intends to lower inflation by encouraging more saving. While he is about it, he should lift the threat of higher wage inflation resulting from the Government's legislation.

The economy faces difficult times. Many businesses and individuals are doing well while manufacturing is in grave trouble. There are still worries about inflation at a time when industry is on the brink of recession. Only this Chancellor could pull off that unique double. I say to Labour Members, "I do not expect you to back me or to praise my views. By all means follow the Whips and the spin doctors and make your routine criticisms of past Conservative policies if that makes you feel better. But understand that your manufacturing constituents in fear of their jobs and people who fear for their businesses expect you to speak for them. You have a duty in this debate to tell the Government before it is too late of the threat to industry from the high pound. If you do not do that, you will find it difficult to face yourselves tomorrow morning, you will have let down your constituents, and you will have failed to do your job."

7.46 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"deplores the Opposition's attempt to criticise the economic management of the Government as a feeble attempt to cover up their own appalling record of economic mis-management; notes that under the Conservatives Britain slumped in the world prosperity league, saw the slowest period of growth since World War II, saw higher average inflation than in any other major industrialised country bar Italy, and had the lowest level of investment of any of the 24 OECD countries; also notes that the Conservatives left office with manufacturing investment lower than it was when they came to power, left Britain's share of world trade at its lowest ever, gave Britain a deficit on manufacturing trade for the first time ever, saw thousands of manufacturing firms go under due to their boom and bust policies, more than doubled the level of unemployment in their period in office, and left behind not a golden economic legacy, but an economy and public finances facing real difficulties; congratulates the Government on its prompt actions such as promoting the competitiveness agenda and fostering investment in R & D and innovation, and creating an open and transparent framework for monetary and fiscal policy to secure a platform of stability for growth and employment; and notes that the Government is addressing the problems which the Conservative Government left behind with positive practical proposals to take the nation into the 21st century."

This is a truly remarkable day and an even more remarkable debate, because in their motion the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor, let alone the shadow President of the Board of Trade, are all calling for manufacturing to be higher up the Government's agenda and for a change of policy

"before factories close and jobs are lost."

That is incredible. Where have they been for the past 18 years?

Where were they 10 years ago when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, as a deliberate act of policy, drove sterling above the level that it is at today? Where were they when Britain registered the first deficit in trade on manufactures since the industrial revolution; when interest soared to 15 per cent., twice today's rate; when factories closed; and when jobs were lost the length and breadth of Britain as a direct result of deliberate Government policy?

The then Chancellor told us that manufacturing no longer mattered. At that time they were in direct control of interest rates, a policy that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) says would solve manufacturing's problems. They were in the Government and some of them were in the Cabinet. When the interest rate was 15 per cent. the right hon. Gentleman, who claimed a little bit of amnesia, was a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry. He now presumes to attack us for an interest rate that is half that level. He asked why I had not spoken out against high interest rates. Where was he? What did he say about interest rates and about manufacturing when interest rates were at twice today's level?

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): May I remind my right hon. Friend that, when the shadow President of the Board of Trade was Secretary of State for Wales, he did nothing at all?

Mrs. Beckett: I know that the right hon. Gentleman rarely visited Wales—so it might have been a bit difficult to do anything there. Today, the right hon. Gentleman has claimed that the Government were wrecking manufacturing by giving independence to the Bank of England. All I can say is that the previous Government managed to wreck manufacturing without giving independence to the Bank.

Before the general election, when the exchange rate was climbing, most hon. Members who signed today's motion were in the Cabinet. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) said, two thirds of the recent increase in sterling occurred in 1996 and 1997—preceding not only the Government's election but the decision to place handling of interest rates in the

hands of the Bank of England and business tax changes. It is therefore difficult to decide whether the Conservatives' belated discovery of the importance of manufacturing represents a deathbed conversion, or simply mass hypocrisy, based on complete memory wipe.

I do not attempt to tag the entire Conservative party with that label, as there were always honourable—although only a few—exceptions. Although some men and women in the Conservative party supported British manufacturing However, they were lone voices crying in the wilderness in their party's utter neglect of—and sometimes outright hostility to—manufacturing.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Indeed I will, although the hon. Gentleman was not one of the exceptions.

Mr. Paterson: As someone who spent the 18 years of the Conservative Government travelling the world, selling abroad for British manufacturing industry—unlike virtually every Labour Member—I bitterly resent the crass and ignorant comments on Conservative policies, which enabled British industry to turn itself round. Will the right hon. Lady tell the House whether British industry is happy and can prosper with a deutschmark rate of 3.05?

Mrs. Beckett: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman was selling his exports, but he certainly was not in this country seeing the demise of British manufacturing industry. Indeed, because of the policies pursued by the Conservative party, we sometimes feared the almost complete extinction of British manufacturing industry.

Down the years, Conservative Members who supported British manufacturing industry called, as we called, for recognition of the damage being done by the boom and bust cycle resulting from the crass incompetence of Tory economic management. They called, as we called, for support for policies encouraging long-term investment, particularly in research and development. They called in vain.

Mr. Paterson: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No.

Under the Conservative Government, manufacturing investment fell—

Mr. Paterson: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall not give way again to the hon. Gentleman, but will wait for another Conservative Member to intervene. His previous intervention was not so impressive as to make me feel inclined to listen to him again.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge) *rose—*

Mr. Lansley: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Not for the moment.

Under the Conservative Government, manufacturing investment fell to an all-time low. Expenditure on research and development fell compared to that of our competitors. As a proportion of our economy, manufacturing dropped by one quarter. Factories closed, and jobs were lost in their millions. None of the Conservative Members who have just intervened in the debate were in the House in that period. Presumably, all of them were out in the country, hopefully in some prosperous undertaking. Where they were not was in the House, watching British manufacturing being destroyed by the activities of the previous Government.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way on this occasion, if not on previous ones. She seems very keen to explain to the House her views on what is happening today. Will she therefore be sure not to move on without telling us about today's announcements on precisely what is happening in manufacturing output and production output? What figures have been announced today, and what view does she take of them?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall deal with that later in my speech.

After the first recession under the previous Government—I realise that Conservative Members wish not to think about their record in government, but they will have to—in the early 1980s, manufacturing output did not return to the level that they had inherited until 1988. In their second recession, in the early 1990s, manufacturing output fell again. In their entire period in office, manufacturing output grew annually on average by only 0.5 per cent.

The instability that devastated output also discouraged long-term investment, which lays foundations for the future. As a share of gross domestic product, manufacturing investment fell to its lowest level since 1955, and it rose again by an average—in the previous Government's entire period in office—of only 0.5 per cent. a year.

It is very important to keep putting those simple facts on the record: first, because the Conservative party—as usual—is trying to rewrite its history; secondly, and more importantly, because it is part of the context in which the British people and British manufacturers should judge the credibility of Conservative Members' comments in this debate. They should be judged not only on the worth of their current proposals but on their record in office.

Mr. Sheerman: Some of us have been puzzled by the Opposition's opening speech, in a debate chosen by the Opposition, as they have spent so little time dealing with the issue of the United Kingdom's core manufacturing capacity. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the fact that only 9,725 robots are currently being used in British manufacturing—compared with 400,000 in Japan, 55,000 in the United States and 48,000 in Germany—is the mark of the sophistication of our manufacturing industry? Over 20 years, the previous Government left us with very little of that sophistication.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend has a long and honourable record of campaigning for British manufacturing. He is entirely right to identify the many difficulties that were left to us by the previous Government.

The previous Government's record stretches over 18 years, whereas this Government's record extends over fewer than 18 months. However, in that short period, we have begun to tackle the deep-seated ills besetting British manufacturing industry.

[Mrs. Beckett]

The very action of which Conservative Members now complain—placing control of interest rates in the hands of the Bank of England—was taken to foster confidence in the long-term stability of economic management. In the run-up to the general election, that confidence was damaged by the political manipulation of interest rates by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who preferred to risk higher inflation, and the damage that that would cause, than to risk political unpopularity.

Long-term interest rates are already lower, and only the crassly irresponsible would suggest that a return to the boom and bust over which the Conservatives presided would be in Britain's interests.

We have not only taken that major step to promote stability, but our commitment to stable economic management, to a sound framework for discipline in public finances, to a reduction of public sector debt—which the previous Government ran up to unmanageable levels—are helping to create a sound and stable framework in which business can take decisions based on long-term judgments.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): If our public sector debt is at unmanageable levels, how can the Prime Minister support the applications for euro membership of all those other countries?

Mrs. Beckett: Unlike the right hon. Member for Wokingham, I shall not spend all my time in this debate talking about Europe rather than British manufacturing industry. However, I shall deal later in my speech with the point raised by the hon. Gentleman.

The decision to abolish dividend tax credits, the agreement—responding to calls from business—to abolish advance corporation tax, the introduction and continuation of enhanced capital allowances for small firms, cuts in corporation tax rates and changes in capital gains tax will all help to stimulate and support the investment that British manufacturers need for long-term success. Our commitment on business tax rates over this Parliament and our consultation paper on research and development both embody an approach sought by manufacturers for so many years, which, under the previous Government, they sought in vain.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): As the right hon. Lady is talking about stability and long-term investment, does she accept industry's estimates that about 20 per cent. of manufacturing investment is connected to activity in the North sea oil industry? Does she also realise the concerns among many of those in the contracting sector about the instability caused by the Chancellor's continuing indecision in his plans for oil taxation? Those concerns are affecting investment decisions, which may be put off for another year.

Mrs. Beckett: With respect to the hon. Gentleman—who takes a great interest in those matters—he must be aware that that industry has itself asked for consultation on the Government's proposals for taxation, and for its views to be taken into account. Furthermore, the industry specifically asked for the Chancellor not to introduce changes in the North sea regime without consultation, as the previous Government did. Therefore, I understand the point that the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) makes, but he will recognise that it is a bit of swings and roundabouts in that respect.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the President of the Board of Trade acknowledge that higher interest rates, increased business taxation and a soaring pound damage British industry, in some cases lethally, depriving businesses of export orders and getting rid of jobs? If she acknowledges that, why does she not have the decency to admit it, instead of skirting around the subject for the first 13 minutes of her speech?

Mrs. Beckett: I am not skirting around anything. The hon. Gentleman clearly has not been listening. Apart from anything else, I have pointed out how much more damaging was the record of his party in government. Interest rates were at twice the level that they are today.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley and Holderness) *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I am going to get on a little further, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

Mr. Redwood: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Of course.

Mr. Redwood: The President of the Board of Trade is all charm, as always.

I am delighted that the right hon. Lady now agrees that the policies of her Government are damaging. She has just said that she thought that Conservative policies were more damaging, but she has conceded that the policies that this Government are following are damaging. Does she agree with the TUC forecast that 100,000 to 200,000 jobs will be lost as a result of the Government's policies in manufacturing, and is she or is she not going to do something about it?

Mrs. Beckett: I have had a chance only briefly to check on the figure that the right hon. Gentleman gives, but I think that he will find that he has added together two figures in the TUC's forecast that are not meant to be added together. It is not making the forecast that he claims. Nor did I say that I accepted that the Government's policies are damaging British business; I do not accept that. What I did say was that I accepted that there is concern, understandably, about the level of sterling and of interest rates. However, I pointed out that interest rates were at twice today's level when he was at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Cran: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry. I must get on a little more. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman perhaps a little later.

Mr. Cran: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, not at this moment. Sorry.

Apart from the tax framework that we have begun to deliver, British manufacturers have also long sought further investment in education, in skills and in transport infrastructure. Slowly and steadily, that too is beginning to flow. The new deal, the university for industry, the emphasis on lifelong learning, the investment in education for the early years, the improvement in standards—

Mr. Cran: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No. In fact, if the hon. Gentleman does not give me a moment to finish this paragraph, I will not give way to him at all.

The improvement in standards, the extra money for schools, including for long-needed capital investment—all those sit alongside other measures in the recent Budget such as investment in the transport infrastructure and the university challenge fund, a new venture capital fund, to encourage development of the new ideas flowing from British universities.

Mr. Cran: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I was willing to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but, as he is persistently and rudely interrupting me, I am afraid that I no longer intend to do so.

Mr. Cran *rose—*

Mr. Sheerman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What sort of rules do we have in this Chamber, where someone who sits as a Whip one moment is sent by the Front-Bench spokesperson to sit behind him and barrack and intervene on a Labour Member, who is making a serious speech about manufacturing industry?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): There has always been some flexibility on these matters for the Opposition.

Mr. Cran: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Since when has even a Whip not been able to stand and speak for his constituency? In this case, I wanted to ask why—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that that is a totally bogus point of order.

Mrs. Beckett: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) because he has answered a little problem that was puzzling me. When the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran) began to intervene, I was slightly surprised because I did not remember seeing him sitting there, and I almost accused him of not having been in the debate, but I thought that that was unfair and that I must be mistaken. However, my hon. Friend has answered the mystery for me. The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness was here, but not in that place.

Mr. Cran: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I will not.

Within the DTI, one of our first steps was to set up the partnership with British companies, including British exporters, which we promised before and during the last election. The early establishment of the export forum allowed us to draw on the experience and expertise of British exporters. We reversed the wildly unpopular decision to abolish trade fair support, accepted its recommendations for a more focused effort in the key markets that they identified, put in place the largest programme ever of trade fairs and trade promotion campaigns, and recently published a package of proposals that are specifically targeted to help the small exporter.

All that is especially relevant to manufacturers, because they represent the lion's share of our international trade. That trade has undoubtedly been and could continue to be affected by the strength of sterling. The picture, however, is far more patchy—and hence more difficult to read and judge for its policy implications—than the Conservative party pretends.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The right hon. Lady went through the economic history of the past 20 years. Does she accept, as most economists do, that the recessions of the early 1980s and early 1990s were caused primarily by the overvaluation of sterling? That is the very point that Conservative Members are seeking to make: the risk of an overvaluation of sterling can cause precisely what we went through before, which is not stability.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has been listening. Although I understand the concern about sterling's level—the Government have made it plain that, although we want a stable sterling rate, we also want a competitive rate—it is not just for Conservative Members to make that complaint, as they took interest rates to twice today's level and sterling to above today's levels.

Mr. Cran: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cran: The right hon. Lady is frit.

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry, but I do not even remember precisely who the hon. Gentleman is, so the notion that I am frightened of him is extraordinary.

Although exports of goods fell—in value and volume in January—on the latest figures, they are still running above the levels of a year ago; in volume, in fact, exports are a full 6 per cent. up. Although the deficit on trade in goods with the world as a whole rose over the past quarter from £3.5 billion to £4 billion, with a fall in exports and a slight fall in imports, in that same period, the deficit with European Union countries fell. It was the deficit with non-EU countries that rose.

[Mrs. Beckett]

An important part of that patchy picture is that against, for example, the dollar, sterling has remained relatively steady. It is against EU countries that it has risen so much and so sharply.

Mr. Cran *rose—*

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I give way to the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson).

Mr. Paterson: If the right hon. Lady had read the *Evening Standard* tonight, she would have seen that industrial production has dropped for the sixth month out of seven, but will she please go back to my first question, which she has not yet answered? Is she happy with an exchange rate of DM3.05 to DM3.10 to the pound, and what representations is she making to the Chancellor, whenever she meets him, on that?

Mrs. Beckett: I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point repeatedly and I do not propose this second to return to it, although I may do so later in my remarks.

As I say, the point is that sterling against the dollar has remained relatively steady, yet that is the sector of trade that has fallen. Trade with EU countries has certainly not been affected in the same way, although it is against the currencies of EU countries that Conservative Members complain sterling is too high.

I do not suggest for a second that that means that sterling's level against the deutschmark and other EU countries' currencies is unimportant. I point out just that the picture is more complex and not entirely clear. Even the factors influencing manufacturers' costs do not give us a simple picture. The official statistics suggest that the overall price of raw materials and fuels that are used in manufacturing has fallen by a sixth over the past two years and by a tenth over the most recent year. Moreover, according to the most recent statistics, manufacturing output has little changed. In fact, over the past quarter, it was higher than a year ago and, in March, it grew at the fastest rate since May 1997. New orders also grew.

The March CBI monthly trends survey shows that the balance of manufacturers expecting to increase output over the next four months has risen slightly to reach the highest levels since October, and the CBI's forecast projects growth both in exports and manufacturing output over the year. Nevertheless, it remains the Government's long-term objective to achieve a stable and competitive exchange rate. We shall continue to pursue the policies that have already been outlined, in the belief that they will contribute to achieving that goal.

But what about the prescription urged upon us by the Conservative party? First, what is it? The shadow President of the Board of Trade says that the Government should do three things: first, they should take back control of interest rates; secondly, they should reverse the changes made in business taxation; and thirdly, they should take steps to increase savings. Let us take them one by one.

The first suggestion is a move to take back control of interest rates so that they can, I presume, be reduced, in the hope—

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Hear, hear.

Mrs. Beckett: That is extraordinarily helpful. The hope is that that will reduce the level of sterling. Yet again, that runs the risk of weakening the fight against inflation and reawakens precisely the spectre of boom and bust that characterised the right hon. Gentleman's party's record and decimated British manufacturing in the 1980s and 1990s.

Secondly, the shadow President of the Board of Trade calls on us to reverse any and all steps taken in a balanced package of taxation changes, including the windfall tax, which laid the foundation for the new deal, and for increased investment in skills and infrastructure—all things that manufacturers want carried out. Presumably they would all have to go. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Lady, but I have to tell the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran) that sedentary comments are not an acceptable substitute for proper interventions, and the right hon. Lady has refused to take any interventions from him.

Mrs. Beckett: If the shadow Secretary of State resists all our changes in business taxation, he must be calling either for a still greater tightening of public expenditure—no more money for health and education—or for increases in VAT or personal taxation. There is simply "no other 'ole to go to".

In fact, the right hon. Gentleman claimed today that there were two ways to tighten the economy other than through interest rates and sterling. He claimed that they were merely to promote savings or to tax consumption—that is presumably to extend or increase VAT, which we all know is the Conservatives' tax of choice. Of course, that is the tax policy that the Tories pursue but do not admit in advance. There cannot be much doubt that, given half a chance, they would put VAT on fuel back to the 17.5 per cent. that they proposed, and slap VAT on a range of other items.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I am happy to give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he will deny that.

Mr. Redwood: The Opposition have made it clear that we are not proposing any taxes on consumption—we are proposing improvements in savings. I do not know how many times we have to say that, but it is clearly our policy. Of course I and my colleagues are recommending a lower level of public spending than the Government—one has only to consider the number of things that we have opposed already which have needlessly been consuming public expenditure, including all the referendums, devolution administration and so on. They are all things on which we would not have spent money.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman is confirming that he supports a lower level of

public expenditure than the Government are prepared to allow. He may claim that he is going to save money on things like referendums but, viewing the record of the Tory party, most of the British public will recognise that what they are talking about means not pursuing the increases in health and education spending which this Government have introduced.

I had not forgotten that the right hon. Gentleman's chief answer was that the Government should increase savings. It seems to be his main, if not his only, solution. He has expressed concern—for example, in the Budget debate—at a predicted savings ratio of 9 per cent., but, as was pointed out in an intervention, the savings ratio fell to 6 per cent. under the Tories. The right hon. Gentleman claimed that savings as such are falling; in fact, they are going up.

Let us take the right hon. Gentleman's prescription at face value. What steps is he proposing to stimulate savings? The usual incentives would generally be higher interest rates. That would be consistent with the Tories' record—including their record when the right hon. Gentleman was at the DTI—but it seems unlikely to reduce the level of sterling. Today he called for more interest to be payable on national savings, and for more generous tax allowances. That of course means a fiscal loosening, while those who have argued that the Chancellor is not doing enough are arguing for a fiscal tightening. It is certainly contrary to what most commentators who criticise my right hon. Friend, as the right hon. Gentleman has done, are saying. The right hon. Gentleman's prescription makes no sense.

Let us consider what might follow if we were to take the prescription at face value. It rests most heavily on the call on the Government to cut interest rates and, in order to do so, to take back control over them. As has been pointed out several times today, two thirds of the rise in sterling took place before interest rates rose, and while interest rates were in fact controlled by the previous Government. There is certainly a widespread and increasingly strong view that it is a combination of the Asian crisis and nervousness about the soundness of the euro which is attracting investors into sterling, because Britain will not be in the first wave.

The right hon. Gentleman spent most of his speech talking not about manufacturing industry but about the euro. If he agrees with those who argue that one of the things that is putting pressure on sterling is the fact that Britain is not going in, should not he be calling for an early announcement that Britain will go in? That is the logical outcome to the argument that he deploys, and I am surprised that he failed to notice that that is where 10 minutes of his speech were taking him.

Mr. Redwood: The right hon. Lady was not listening to what I said. I said that it was a fudged euro that was putting the extra pressure on sterling, as the Governor of the Bank of England identified. Going in at this high level of sterling would simply lock British exporters into a prison from which they could never escape, and it would mean that we never recaptured the industrial activity that is already at risk.

Mrs. Beckett: I am not advocating going in at this point or at this level of sterling. It is the right hon. Gentleman's argument that leads inexorably to the conclusion that that is one of the ways to weaken the pressure on sterling. The Liberal Democrat party may be somewhat unrealistic in ignoring the clear statement of the Governor of the Bank of England that Britain could not go in in the first wave as a result of the folly in government of the Tory party, but at least it is consistent in so arguing.

The message of the right hon. Member for Wokingham is muddled, inconsistent and, frankly, crazy. It risks the worst of all worlds. A politically driven interference with interest rates would certainly foster inflation, and if, as some of the evidence suggests, it is not Britain's interest rates but Britain's absence from economic and monetary union which is driving up sterling, it would also fail to bring down the exchange rate as he suggests—yet another double whammy.

The Conservatives have tabled an opportunistic motion, based on an unconvincing argument and on the assumption that the rest of the world suffers from their amnesia. Their record on British manufacturing is appalling, their prescription at best ludicrous, and at worst damaging. They offer sound without substance. Their arguments and policies put them where they are now and, on the evidence of this debate, will keep them there for years.

8.17 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I am a vehement and ardent supporter of manufacturing, and my record over the past 18 years proves it. I have never forgotten that this country's wealth was based on the industrial revolution and the manufacturing that flowed from it, although, at times, various Governments have taken their eye off the ball.

I believe that the Department of Trade and Industry is the second most important Department of Government. The sophisticates will have us say how important the Department of Social Security, the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health are because they spend billions of pounds, but I am always conscious of the fact that it is the manufacturing sector that creates the wealth that enables them to spend that money.

There has been some swapping of reminiscences, but I remember being in the House during the humiliating visit from the International Monetary Fund to bail out the Government when they got their spending out of kilter with their income. As the President of the Board of Trade said, quite correctly, we have to look forward and not rewrite history, although I think that for quite a few Members of Parliament the temptation to do just that will prove irresistible.

I said that some Governments take their eye off the ball, but I do not include the previous Government under the premiership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), with my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) as President of the Board of Trade. During that time, there was a welcome return to focusing attention on manufacturing, competitiveness and quality of production.

The current Government are losing out a bit. I do not blame the Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry, because, with the exception of Lord Simon, who seems to have vanished without trace, they have little manufacturing managerial experience. That is not their

[Mr. Richard Page]

fault, and we cannot blame them for it, but if they had had experience, they would have seen the warning signs about manufacturing a few months earlier.

I shall not trample over the ground covered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on the strong pound, but I should like to counter the simplistic argument that, because Germany and Japan have learnt to live with a strong currency, so should we. We can, but it must be on the same time scale.

In 1984, the exchange rate was DM3.74 to the pound. Compared with the current rate, German manufacturers have had to deal with a 1.5 per cent. per year to strengthening of the deutschmark since then. Taking the value of two or three years ago, that figure rises to 3 per cent. Our manufacturers have had to swallow a 25 or 30 per cent. strengthening of sterling over the past couple of years. No manufacturer can claw back that increase through productivity improvements over such a short time. With our interest rates running at twice the level of those of most of our major competitors, that is a double blow.

This debate is important, because it underlines the basis of our economy and how it will develop in the coming years. The Conservative motion correctly concentrates on those issues. The Government amendment is largely a tendentious account of the past, with some wishful thinking for the future. It does not recognise the serious problems that the British manufacturing sector faces, and it does not come up with any proposals to tackle those problems.

It is in nobody's interests to ignore the facts. There has been—dare I say it—a lot of infantile shouting across the Chamber, which has not contributed greatly to the debate. After 1992, our manufacturing output increased year by year. Unfortunately, there are now signs that it is peaking and starting to go the wrong way. If everything was marvellous, we would not be reading in the papers about the difficult choices facing General Motors and its work force in the United Kingdom. To make matters even more complicated, wage costs continue to rise as the sterling price of exports runs into trouble.

In 1994-95, and in the latter part of 1996 and the early months of 1997, output grew strongly. Gains in productivity were secured and unit costs came down. However, there are now problems with our output. There could be stagnation or a decline in productivity. Those trends can be reversed only if manufacturers consider ways of trimming the size of their work force, laying off those who have recently left the unemployment register. We do not like that uncomfortable truth, and I am sure that Labour Members do not either.

It is no good saying that the problem can be addressed through an open and transparent framework for monetary and fiscal policy. The Governor of the Bank of England has been given control over the one lever with which to control monetary policy without a matching fiscal policy from the Chancellor. That is less than sensible. It will prove to be another financial theory that bites the dust.

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting and constructive speech. Does he accept that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken £17 billion out of the economy? Does the hon. Gentleman think that he should have taken £20 billion or £25 billion? Does he agree with his Whip, who said, "Hear, hear," when the abolition of the Monetary Policy Committee was suggested, with control over interest rates reverting to Whitehall? That is not a provocative question. I am genuinely interested in the hon. Gentleman's response, because I respect his point of view.

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The Chancellor has bitten into the economy in the wrong place. We wanted to cool the activities in the marketplace, to reduce internal inflation. The Chancellor has put an extreme burden on industry, which will work its way through with the double whammy of high interest rates and a high exchange rate.

I am not surprised to read reports that the Chancellor is hoping that the Bank of England will give a signal later this week that interest rates have peaked and will not rise further. That has all the characteristic subtlety of a Treasury spin doctor. Unfortunately, it is too late. Manufacturers will intensify switching production abroad, because—as I think we all accept—the exchange rate is too high.

We should skip all the childish banter and get to the reality. AG Holdings, our largest drum manufacturer, is moving production to France. The engineering group Haden Maclellan will buy half its paint shop components and one quarter of its fasteners abroad. Others will follow those two. That means that jobs are being exported from the United Kingdom, helping the economies in other countries rather than ours.

Mr. Geraint Davies: If things are so bad, how does the hon. Gentleman explain the fact that last year we had the first trade surplus since 1985, and the largest since 1982, at £4.5 billion? In 1996, we had a deficit of £1.8 billion, when, as others have pointed out, 70 per cent. of the sterling appreciation had already occurred. The hon. Gentleman seems to be describing a different world from that in which we are living.

Mr. Page: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has ever worked in business or industry. He should know that there is a time lag in business. The current figures should show what will happen tomorrow if measures are not put in place to correct them. We believe that the higher rate of sterling will have a damaging effect on manufacturing. That effect will intensify unless action is taken to rectify the situation. Action a few months ago would have reduced the pain. Action now will reduce the pain. However, if we go on blindly, there will be further unemployment and even more pain. We are trying to point out delicately that something should be done.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that a week ago I had lunch with the chairman and chief executive of Nestlé, which exports £300 million of produce. They pointed out that, while the level of sterling obviously causes difficulties for their export business, the Government's long-term policies are correct to create a healthy context for buoyant growth for Britain in the global economy.

Mr. Page: I hope that the hon. Gentleman had a satisfactory and enjoyable lunch. Nestlé is a large company with plants all over the world. Undoubtedly

it will take certain strategic decisions. Many British-based companies do not have the same options and flexibility as larger companies. The hon. Gentleman does not help his cause by pleading on behalf of a large multinational. With the high rate of sterling, our splendid record of inward investment is starting to dip. Companies abroad are not going to invest in Britain. A year or so ago, however, we had the enviable record of the highest investment percentage of any European country.

The fundamental problem we must face cannot be tackled by the old sticking-plaster approach of Labour Governments, yet that is exactly what is beginning to be contemplated. Ordering electricity generators to buy up to 30 million tonnes of coal from UK producers, irrespective of prices on the world market, will not help the productivity of British producers or make them more competitive. Labour Members should remember that, when the Conservatives came to power in 1979, we were putting our hands in the taxpayers' pockets for £50 million every week, and that, now, approximately £50 million is being given to the Exchequer in taxes.

We have heard a great deal about the Government's policy towards the young and the young long-term unemployed. I am concerned that any benefits that might flow from such a policy will be offset by what is happening with the high price of sterling. I was therefore not surprised to read that, when Mr. Christopher Kelly, the Treasury's head of economic briefing and analysis, was asked whether the manufacturing sector was likely to go into recession, he replied that the Treasury was forecasting zero growth this year. Today, a report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research Ltd. said:

"Strong pound means a mini-recession and rising unemployment."

It is therefore not surprising that the TUC expects unemployment to rise by 200,000. Perhaps figures are being added together, but as far as I am concerned, the figure is 200,000 unless somebody can prove that the TUC did not make such a statement. If such a number of jobs were lost, there would be further deterioration and we would go into a downward spiral, as opposed to the virtuous upward spiral that the Conservatives achieved, giving the Labour party its golden legacy.

If we start on such a downward spiral, Labour Members will be back to the old routine. They will be calling for full-scale programmes to stimulate public expenditure and to help the economy to generate growth—whatever the implications for inflation. Unless *The Times* is mistaken today, there are already Cabinet splits, with mention of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, whose names are of course attached to the Government amendment.

The sad fact is that, despite all the Government's fine words, they cannot escape from the economic cycle that they have created. They have happily tightened taxes on business in the past year, while allowing sterling's rise to weaken our export performance and increase the attractiveness of imports. Now the Government are caught between those two rocks of contradiction, and we shall see unemployment rise and companies fail. It is no good Labour Members throwing their hands in the air and claiming that it is all somebody else's fault. Undoubtedly, they will all go into the Lobby to vote for the Government amendment.

I think that it was the playwright Alan Bennett who said that he had always felt that the past was over, that somehow he had missed it, and that now it was starting all over again. New Labour will find that the spectre of old Labour has not been exorcised, but is alive and well. The strong pound might give the Prime Minister a little extra spending money in Tuscany this summer, but driving our manufacturing into recession is too high a price to pay.

8.33 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who was a most excellent Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry—that is not quite what I said at the time—but, alas, does not represent his party's Front-Bench policy. That is a great shame.

We heard a magnificent speech from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who has left the Chamber. His speech was one of a valiant shadow Foreign Secretary, since two thirds of it was on Europe. His speech was also one of a valiant shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, since he told us what the Chancellor should do. I wish the right hon. Gentleman well in the reshuffle. Perhaps, instead of a job share, he can combine both posts and fit everything into his head. His speech was not remotely about British manufacturing or remotely relevant to the motion.

As I am a great friend of the Trades Union Congress, I am very pleased that the Conservatives pray it in aid. Conservative Members ought to look at the TUC's prognosis that, on a simple linear projection—we can all do that—200,000 jobs could be lost in manufacturing and services. Only 90,000 of those could be in manufacturing over the next two years, which, although that would be 90,000 too many, has nothing to do with the poorly worded motion.

The past is another country. I agree with the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire that running over it is not helpful. In the previous debate, we were taken right back to the White Paper "In Place of Strife", and we have had a run around what happened in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. I shall try not to do that, although it is rather difficult to avoid just the teeny-weeniest tip-toe back—not too far. I am a reasonably new Member—there are many new Members—and what happened under previous Governments can be left in the past.

We need to consider the fact that the significant rise of sterling that is worrying us all took place between May 1996 and May 1997—when it rose by 20 per cent. As the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire rightly said, we cannot simply pray in aid the German, Swiss, Dutch or Japanese experience of living with a strong currency over time. Believe me, I am taking us into the 1970s and not trying just to make an anti-Conservative point; as everybody knows, I am a bipartisan kind of fellow.

We have suffered from a yo-yo currency. Between May 1990 and May 1997, under two Prime Ministers and four Chancellors, the rate between sterling and the deutschmark changed no fewer than 87 times. No business person can seriously plan or deal with that. The dollar was relatively stable. There was a great deal of money to be made by the George Soroses of the world or on for-ex trading, but for the business man, the manufacturer, who was trying to plan his output and draw up a macro-economic plan that would make sense, such permanent instability was one of the most damaging factors.

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

British Steel, of which I know something as one of its biggest plants is in my constituency, saw a massive 50 per cent. drop in profits, from £1.1 billion to £450 million, when they were announced halfway through the summer. In other words, its profit hit was a result of the previous Government's policies.

Dr. Palmer: Conservative Members are quite persuaded of my hon. Friend's point about the need for stable exchange rates, because they were pressing the President of the Board of Trade to quote an exact rate that she would think appropriate—DM3.05, DM3.02, or whatever. If that is what they want, they clearly want a fixed exchange rate.

Mr. MacShane: Playing the game of what the rate should be is interesting and useful—we do it with our children—but I am not sure whether it is a realistic contribution. We must create the conditions across the economy that back manufacturing and achieve what may be an impossible double goal—stability and competitiveness.

I put these questions regularly to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), when he was Chancellor, and to his minions at the Treasury, and answer came there none. He said that the free markets decide. In March 1997, he said that he did not control the value of the pound. That is official Conservative policy, and is no different from the remarks of the putative shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

When the right hon. Member was asked whether he would renationalise the Monetary Policy Committee—whether he would abolish it and send all the economists and Dr. DeAnne Julius back to work—and bring control of interest rates back to the Treasury, the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) seemed to agree, while the right hon. Gentleman shook his head vigorously. I thought that it was a cardinal virtue of modern Tory faith that there should be independence for the Bank of England. I invite Conservative Members—we have some experienced business people and City experts in the Chamber—to raise their hands if they think that the Monetary Policy Committee should be abolished and control returned to the Bank of England. The House has the answer it deserves.

If that is not an answer, what is? I am passionately in favour of manufacturing. The right hon. Member for Wokingham made some unpleasant and snide remarks about Powerhouse UK and the bouncy castles now open in Horse Guards parade. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry to stretch the public sector borrowing requirement by a little to provide free passes for all hon. Members. I went there on Sunday, and I was delighted to see the creativity, the new talent and the energy of which British manufacturing is capable.

One of the great myths with which we have to deal—what we may call the Lawson myth—is that trading a pound, and making a pound by trading a pound, is just as good for the economy as making a thing and making a pound by selling the thing. I am not sure whether the hon. Member for leather goods—the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson)—would agree with that philosophy, although some of the experts in rentier capitalism did very well under the Lawson philosophy. That is complete and utter rubbish. The thesis that we are entering a so-called "weightless economy" in which all that counts is the service industry is not supported by the facts.

Britain imports and exports six times more in tonnes of goods than it did 30 years ago. If one looks through our newspapers and magazines, what does one see? The pages are full of advertisements for things; for goods such as the hon. Member for North Shropshire and his company make—I did not mean any offence in my remark. Long may the British leather industry flourish.

Mr. Flight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacShane: To an expert in the field, of course.

Mr. Flight: Will the hon. Member acknowledge that, in a world of relatively free trade, goods will be produced where the cost is lowest, and that the mixture in countries such as Switzerland of good international services with industry is perhaps ideal? The argument that one is more virtuous than the other is not valid.

Mr. MacShane: I am glad to see that, even without a beeper, the hon. Gentleman is completely on the new Labour message. That is exactly the point which the Prime Minister and the Chancellor make all the time. I know a little about Switzerland, which is a good example. Some 10 per cent. more of Switzerland's working population are in the manufacturing sector. A strong manufacturing sector is what supports strong financial, service, insurance and banking sectors.

I want some re-balance and an end to the Lawson years. We must refuse to embrace the new, fashionable and pernicious thesis of the weightless economy. I want a commitment to manufacturing—which, I must say, was not in evidence during the Conservatives' period in government. Over the past six years, Britain's manufacturing exports have increased more than the export of services. We are a wonderfully creative and talented country, capable of making wonderful new products.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) is a proponent of the Adam Smith theory of free trade and comparative advantage. It is remarkable that the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire prayed in aid the example of a company that moved to France, when, only a few hours ago, we heard that nobody would go to France because the social and labour costs were too high.

Where are many of the goods that we buy in our giant shopping centres manufactured? Most of the computers are made in Taiwan, whose GDP per capita is a bit lower than that of the UK. However, it has a statutory minimum wage set at 70 per cent. of average industrial earnings in Taiwan. I am not remotely suggesting that such a recklessly high figure should be put into the debate here. A huge number of goods are imported from Singapore and Hong Kong, as was, where the GDP per capita—the standard of wealth of those countries—is above that of the UK. It is a myth that manufactured goods only belong in low-wage economies.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Before the hon. Gentleman waxes too eloquent about the economic

success of Taiwan—like him, I greatly admire that country's achievements—will he remind the House that a great deal of what Taiwan sells is now made by their cousins in Fukien province on the mainland at very low wage rates and low direct labour costs, and is then brought to Taiwan and exported to the rest of the world, contributing to Taiwan's success?

Mr. MacShane: Alas, I have visited Taiwan only once—although I have travelled and worked widely in Asia. I was deeply impressed by the remarkable combination of technological know-how and a commitment to manufacturing on the island, in addition to the sub-contracting that takes place. As someone who believes passionately in free trade, I support those developments.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): The hon. Gentleman has just referred to Taiwan's high technology. Not only is Taiwan facing higher unit labour costs—which is why so much of its manufacturing is now done in mainland China at one twentieth of the cost it would be in Taiwan—but it lacks some of the high technology. That is why the developing countries of the far east are trying hard to attract from the west the advanced technology that will enable them to combine lower wage costs with high technology. If that happens, we will have a problem in the west.

Mr. MacShane: I was born an optimist and I shall die one. I have confidence in our country and in its abilities, and in the abilities and talent of the west to continually move upstream. At the same time, we must not ignore the fundamental contribution that basic manufacturing makes.

I mentioned steel, a subject to which I shall return at the end of my speech. I represent a steel constituency, and steel is a profoundly environmentally friendly product. It now involves the latest technology. If one visits a steel mill, one does not see men cowering in front of furnaces, although the plants are still tremendously dramatic places to visit. Now, the majority of the men sit behind computer screens. That is exactly the sort of high-tech industry in which we need to invest, but it has not had the backing of the country as a whole—again, I say this on a bipartisan basis—that it deserves.

I will briefly suggest three measures to support manufacturing. First, we must continually invest in training. In Edinburgh the other week, I was impressed to hear Hans-Olaf Henkel, the president of the German employers federation, who is a great fan of the deregulated, flexible labour market in Britain, make a powerful speech saying that the one thing that the Germans would never give up was their commitment to training. Whenever I or my hon. Friends have argued for an equivalent commitment by employers to training in this country, we have been told that we would be imposing an unbearable additional cost on them.

I am delighted that the new deal contains a strong training component and excited by the concept of the university of industry. When it gets off the ground, it will help to connect many of our skilled people.

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Mr. MacShane: I mean no discourtesy to the hon. Gentleman, but I want to allow other hon. Members to speak in the debate, so I want to finish my remarks.

The second necessary development is to break the centralised power of London over so much of our economy. One of the most exciting aspects of the new Government has been the move towards decentralisation. I welcome the creation of regional development agencies. Like the successful economies of the world—the United States, with 50 states setting their own tax levels and attracting their own investment, Germany with its lander system and Switzerland, with its 24 cantons—we must have a local economic response and give my region of South Yorkshire, for example, the power to control more of its economic destiny. Watch us take off if that happens. We have to break completely with the centralised Tory state set up in the past 20 years.

Thirdly, we need a relationship with Europe. I have no doubt in my mind that the contribution from the shadow President of the Board of Trade was disgraceful—that obsessive, bubbling Europhobia burst its banks. We need a relationship with what is loosely called Euroland—that is now the technical term for the countries entering European monetary union—and it will require a fundamental decision by the people of this country.

A great signal was sent last May, when the Europhobic policies of the Tories were utterly rejected at the ballot box, and the Chancellor sent good signs in his statement in November. What has been the reaction of the Conservative party? Instead of grappling with that debate, we read—

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mr. MacShane: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way, as I want to finish my speech.

We read in *The Daily Telegraph* today that a group of rather elderly, anti-European business men are setting up a new campaign against European monetary union. Who is to launch their conference? The Leader of the Opposition. Once again, the Europhobic virus is uncontainable in the Conservative party. I see that Conservative Members are waking up and becoming excited at that. We need to sort out our relationship with Europe.

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mr. MacShane: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman had a chance to speak, and I have given away generously.

I urge Ministers to look hard at what needs to be done for our steel industry.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. MacShane: I am sorry not to give way, above all to the hon. Gentleman, but I have not given way to his hon. Friends, and I must treat hon. Members equally. I must sit down in a minute or so.

I appeal to the Minister who is to reply to look seriously at what needs to be done to back one of our most modern industries. The British steel industry could set on extra shifts. Last Friday, I met a nuts and bolts manufacturer from the Rotherham-Sheffield border who is hiring new people because the company has the orders. The evidence

[Mr. MacShane]

about this famous recession is far from clear. If we can get certain parameters of a pro-manufacturing policy in place, our firms will take off.

We are setting targets for education and for health. I would have no problems with the development of a long-term infrastructure target for the United Kingdom. The other day, I was astonished to find that I had to climb up the steps from the tube to King's Cross and on up to St. Pancras station, as there was no escalator. It placed old people, those with children and the wheelchair-bound in an impossible position. Surely there cannot be another railway station in Europe that requires people to climb up on foot. Let us have a proper 10-year infrastructure investment plan.

I am shamelessly patriotic on this subject, so let us also have an encouragement not to fly the flag overseas, as the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office do that together very well, but to fly it internally, so that, where possible, without breaking tender or competition rules, people can be encouraged to buy British-made products. I was delighted to see that Mr. Paul Smith had one of his suits in Powerhouse UK and would urge all hon. Members to let go of their Armani suits and put away their German-made Boss suits and buy Jasper Conran and Paul Smith. I try to wear Mr. Conran as often as I can—I wish that I could afford to eat in his daddy's restaurants.

We also need cheaper energy prices. That is one of the big problems facing manufacturers and, again, it is an inheritance—I can feel myself being dragged back to the subject of history. The way in which the energy utilities were privatised gave the domestic consumer privileges, but industry was heavily sacrificed.

We also need to encourage partnership politics in industry. I must pay tribute to a union with which I work—the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, which works well for the British steel industry. In 15 years, it has not had one strike. Unfortunately, all we heard in the debate two or three hours ago was the old adversarial language of them and us—"Treat 'em mean; keep 'em keen"—and hire and fire politics. We need a new approach to partnership in manufacturing industry, particularly in the steel industry.

In conclusion, I must make a rather odd appeal, perhaps one that runs against the adversarial nature of the House, which is that, where possible, we should find common cause, particularly on our relationship with Europe and EMU, and on reforming the way in which our country is governed and administered, so that people in the regions can support manufacturing without some giant development plan, which never works, as we have seen. We should give up the ideology that manufacturing does not count—the ideology that says that only service industries count and that we can live in a weightless cyberworld. We should back our creative industries, but we should not forget that steel exports amounted to four times the exports of all the music industry of the United Kingdom put together.

British steel workers do not smoke dope or snort coke, they are not called Rumbaba and do not dump pails of water over the head of the Deputy Prime Minister, but they are working hard for Britain, just as our car workers are, by exporting £8 billion-worth of steel last year, along the lines of partnership, a positive engagement with Europe and a commitment to regional development. If my hon. Friend the Minister could encourage those ideas and policies, British manufacturing will win in the next century.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you draw to Madam Speaker's attention the fact that out of a two and three quarter hour debate, the first hour and three quarters has been occupied by four speeches? Can that be right for the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): That is not a matter for the Chair.

8.58 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I intend to be brief, but I agree with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I do not want to waste too much of my time in responding to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), but, in talking about the Bank of England's freedom to set interest rates, he missed the point—the question is not whether allowing the Bank of England that freedom is right, but whether the Government's fiscal policy is aligned with that freedom.

The President of the Board of Trade spoke scornfully about past boom-and-bust cycles, but she gives the same hostage to fortune as the Prime Minister does time and again. Unless they heed the warnings of major—and many smaller and medium-sized—British manufacturing companies about the strength of sterling, they will find themselves in precisely such a cycle.

I remember the 1970s as well as 18 excellent years of Conservative rule. During much of the 1970s, I was involved in manufacturing in the west midlands. Labour Members should remember the conditions that obtained between 1976 and 1979, and remind themselves of a book written by the then general secretary of Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, Clive Jenkins—it was called "The World of Work", I think—in which he predicted, before the winter of discontent and the 1979 general election, that unemployment would rise in the early 1980s to 6 million as a result of the collapse of manufacturing industry. To believe that what happened was all down to Conservative policy is to ignore the facts.

Over the past 25 years, there have been seismic shifts in world manufacturing, prompted by inflation, the technology revolution and the emergence of highly competitive third world and Pacific basin suppliers operating with dramatically lower direct labour costs than have proved possible in the strongest European economies.

In the world recessions of the early 1980s and at the start of this decade, the best British manufacturers survived. They embraced the realities and exploited the advantages that the changing scene presented. Leaner, fitter and hungrier companies thrived in the Conservative climate of market liberalisation, privatisation, less regulation, less Government intervention, high inward investment and—by the mid-1990s, at least—rapid growth in gross domestic product, with low inflation and falling unemployment.

Since last May, however, there have been worrying signs that the positive scenario for British industry that was created by the Conservative Government is being drastically undermined. First, the Government have an

instinct for intervention. Secondly, there are fundamental flaws in their economic policy. Thirdly, they fail even to try to check the European scramble to introduce a single currency without sufficiently stringent disciplines over economic convergence.

New Labour may have consulted its focus groups and learnt that business-friendly noises are what voters want to hear, but the Government's actions have not been business-friendly. Signing up to the social chapter was only the beginning. Social partnership is a euphemism for Government dictating how employees and employers should interact, instead of allowing them to get on with it themselves. Conservative Members will certainly strongly challenge the much-heralded "Fairness at Work" White Paper when it is published next month.

The threat of a return to the bad old days of a Government-enforced system of employee representation in the workplace will destroy hard-won competitiveness and job security. The fact that the Government are pressing ahead with the National Minimum Wage Bill defies belief—unemployment in the rest of the European Union demonstrates the dangers that will befall the British economy if the minimum wage is pitched at anything above a nominal level.

Similarly, the enthusiasm for business improvement districts and town and city improvement zones points to a return to the weaknesses in the previous Labour Government's thinking in the late 1970s, when companies that were arbitrarily excluded from the geography of development zones were tempted to close factories, disrupt local communities and move into those zones because of the artificial inducement of Government subsidies. The only result was that one town's gain was another town's loss, with no obvious benefit to British industry as a whole. Equally, giving local authorities a freer hand on business rates will have a disruptive effect, as it did in the late 1970s.

The proposals for the board membership of regional development agencies will mean that industrialists will be in a minority on those boards, and so unable to prevent the rubber-stamping actions of the RDA directors, who will do the Government's bidding for yet further intervention. Why, for example, change the role of English Partnerships, which has done so well nationally, or be tempted to intervene in the Invest in Britain Bureau? Why suck into the RDAs the job done so well by the Rural Development Commission, which has been so successful in promoting micro-industrial development in rural areas?

Worse still is the Government's assumption that industry will somehow benefit from Government-sponsored working parties. I remember a Minister saying that the Government were seeking ideas about the way in which Britain could become more competitive, but industry needs not another export forum or talking shop, but simply the freedom to get on with its job of wealth creation with as little bureaucratic interference as possible.

Much has been said this evening about economic policy, so I shall be brief. The Government's pre-election pledge not to touch income tax has already begun to look short-sighted. The Chancellor's raid on pension funds and the added cash flow pressure that he has imposed on business—by proposing that advance corporation tax be collected quarterly—were misguided and mistimed. At the very time that he has given the Bank of England a free hand, he has failed to encourage savings or to dampen consumer demand, much of which is now being directed towards imports that are artificially cheap as a result of the strength of sterling.

The Prime Minister's words at the weekend about helping Japan and the rest of Asia rang hollow. He and the Chancellor seem unprepared to face up to the dangers of an imminent recession in United Kingdom manufacturing that will arise because of their failure to co-ordinate their fiscal policy with interest rate management at the Bank of England, despite the fact that, compared with Japan, Britain relies on exports for twice the percentage of its GDP.

Labour Members seem to suggest that the European single currency will have no effect on British manufacturing industry, but that is not so. The Government's failure to speak out during the UK's presidency of the European Union about the dangers of a headlong rush to monetary union, with insufficient concern about economic convergence, will create a weaker euro, which is bound to be preyed on in the currency markets. The effect will be economic stresses and tensions among member states that are certain to impinge on Britain's trade with the rest of Europe, at the very least.

One has only to imagine the plight of a hypothetical single Pacific currency. It would have been undermined by Japanese economic failure, having first been softened up by the related problems in South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand or Malaysia, and then it would have gone through the floor, dragging down good regional economies along with bad ones. Unless the EU deals with the structural deficiencies in its member economies that are being masked by a lax interpretation of convergence criteria, further trouble lies ahead.

We should also consider the conflict of interest that faces so many EU countries that are determined to introduce the single currency without delay. That is the conflict between growing unemployment and the need for a tougher fiscal stance. Many influential voices in Germany, France and elsewhere in the European Union recognise the rod for their own back that is being created by politicians and bureaucrats hell-bent on political union via monetary union and the single currency.

Our priority should be not scepticism about Britain's fate in the single currency, but the effect on British industry of the economic instability and tension that are bound to follow the first wave of entrants into the single currency if they disregard the prerequisite of genuine economic convergence. The Government's failure to get that message across to our EU partners during Britain's presidency bodes ill for British industry.

The Government make brave noises, but fail to understand the realities of the sharp end of line management in British industry, and the wealth creation that goes with it. Their failure to resist interventionist temptations, their muddled economic thinking and their inability to say boo to the rest of Europe when boo should be said, will create further problems and destroy British competitiveness.

9.9 pm

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): The Conservatives are to be congratulated on securing this important debate. The Government forecast growth in

[Mr. Brian Cotter]

manufacturing output this year of only zero per cent. to 0.5 per cent., and with the very strong pound, the risk is that there could even be a mini-recession in manufacturing this year, with falling output. The situation in Asia has increased the risk, and makes it all the more important to debate the prospects for manufacturing industry.

However, that is where my congratulations to the Tories end. No one can forget their record in government over 18 long, hard years. I did not get elected to the House to forget that record, which affected not only my constituents but myself, as managing director of a manufacturing company in the plastics industry.

The nation experienced a severe slump in 1980-81, with substantial exchange rate over-valuation, and a recession in 1990–92. Both busts were caused by irresponsible Conservative policies, and they led to muscle as well as fat being lost from industry. It was hypocritical of the Conservatives to table the motion, when many members of the shadow Cabinet agreed to the implementation of the measures that led to the decimation of manufacturing industry.

The Tory record does not hold up. So bad were the Tories at promoting British manufacturing that, in 1993, after 14 years of Tory rule, manufacturing output was at the same level as it had been 20 years earlier, in 1973. Between 1979 and 1981, manufacturing output fell by 18 per cent. in real terms. There had not been a similar collapse in industrial output since 1920–21. All that from a party that has consistently claimed that the economy is safe only in its hands.

The facts get worse. The motion refers to employment in manufacturing industry, but the hard fact is that manufacturing employment fell by 2.682 million jobs between 1979 and 1996; four jobs in every 10 disappeared under the Tories, yet they call on the Government to change policies

"before factories close and jobs are lost."

If we Liberal Democrats did not know better, the startling arrogance of the official Opposition would almost beggar belief. This is not the first occasion in this Parliament when they have made U-turns on policies.

Those statistics represent the average. Let us consider the worst years. In 1980–81, 650,000 manufacturing jobs were lost; in 1982, another 320,000 were lost; and in 1983, another 307,000 went down the drain. In only three years, an astonishing 1.277 million jobs were lost in manufacturing.

Mrs. Thatcher's monetarist policies created those losses, and many of the current shadow Cabinet supported them at the time. In 1981, she said:

"Of course I am deeply concerned about the plight of the unemployed and those businesses which are suffering severely. We shall do everything we can to help them. What we cannot do is change our essential strategy."

It was a strategy for job losses. It was her inflexibility that caused so many to suffer. The Government should learn from her crucial mistakes.

Those episodes were caused largely by exchange rate over-valuation and instability. In the early 1980s, sterling rose by 18 per cent. against the deutschmark, in spite of higher UK inflation. That is why the Liberal Democrats regard the current situation so seriously. In the past 18months, sterling has risen 30 per cent. on a trade-weighted basis, which has had a profound effect on our manufacturing industry.

Figures released today show that manufacturing output is down. In the three months to February, output fell by 0.5 per cent. compared with the previous three months. Just over half manufacturing industries have shown decreases in production, as I know from my company. There was a 1.8 per cent. decrease in the output of the textiles, leather and clothing industries; 1.6 per cent. in chemicals and man-made fibres; and 1 per cent. in the pulp, paper, printing and publishing industries. The signs of impending danger are there. The Government have a duty to listen seriously to the manufacturing industries, and to take action to avoid a devastating repeat of 1980–81 and 1990 to 1992.

The Government talk much about stability. We welcome operational independence for the Bank of England, and the fiscal stability code. Both those policies were in our manifesto, if not in Labour's. We applaud the Government for adopting our policies. Meanwhile, the Tories are hopelessly incoherent on the Bank of England. They have already been asked, and I ask again, whether they would take back political control over interest rates. We would like to hear their answer. The former Conservative Chancellor berates the new monetary system in the UK while supporting the single currency, which would also require an operationally independent central bank.

The Tories clearly have much thinking to do, but so do the Government. To tax and interest rate stability, we must add exchange rate stability. That is why a clear decision for early economic and monetary union entry would be advantageous to Britain and to industry.

Mr. Flight: Not at this rate.

Mr. Cotter: Such a decision would cap the pound's rise and help industry. Businesses are irritated by the lack of a clear timetable for the single currency. The hon. Gentleman says, "Not at this rate." Had the steps I described been taken at the right time, we would not have the present rate.

The Government should have done a better job on fiscal policy. They claim to have tightened fiscal policy, but most of those measures will not cool the consumer boom in the short term. Raising extra taxes on savings and businesses may seem like good policies, but they are bad economics.

The consumer taxes that the Chancellor has spoken of are modest, or offset by other measures. When asked by the Treasury Select Committee last week to list the actions that he has taken to dampen consumer demand, he could point only to a reduction of mortgage tax relief, which is only just taking effect; a reduction in tax relief via the married couple's allowance, which will take place in 1999; higher stamp duty on highly priced properties; and a higher petrol tax.

Those measures will have only a limited effect on consumer demand. We are back to having only one mechanism. Interest rates alone are being used to dampen the economy, at the cost of a stronger pound and higher costs on industry.

Is the Chancellor feeling somewhat chastened after strong criticism from the Engineering Employers Federation? If not, he should be. The EEF is right to say that the Treasury is "not listening enough" to industry about the damage that the strong pound is doing to UK manufacturers. The EEF also agrees that the problem should be tackled through taxes targeted at the consumer—otherwise, it predicts, up to 50,000 jobs will be lost in the engineering sector alone.

What should the Government do? We Liberal Democrats have consistently argued that money should be devoted towards training and education. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) made a constructive speech, the tenor of which we can support. He spoke about crossing the political boundaries to come up with solutions, the importance of training and education, and the important role that rural development agencies should have in future in regeneration at local level. He also spoke of adopting a rational approach to the European Community.

I fully support many other initiatives, including the foresight initiative, which links science and technology with industry, although many are now saying that it is underfunded. I am glad to see the Government embarking on a programme to help small businesses with exports, but we Liberal Democrats believe that, overall, the Government should have made a stronger commitment toward a single currency.

I could make other constructive points, but I conclude by saying that tonight we have debated a cynical motion from a party that has neither principle or policy. The Conservatives' suggestion that labour standards should be undermined is unacceptable to Liberal Democrats. It may be a bitter pill for the Tories to swallow, but the previous Conservative Government were responsible for much of the decline of manufacturing industry.

However, the Labour Government must learn that flexibility is not a weakness; they must learn to listen, and to change course if a disaster for our manufacturing industry is to be averted. The Chancellor needs to get to grips with a problem that requires the minds and application of politicians of all persuasions, people in industry, trade unions, the City and every other institution that is engaged in productive activity. These are early days for the Labour Government, and they have a chance to develop our economy to support manufacturing industry. We shall judge them on their record, and on their response to the situation we face today.

9.21 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I have noticed in previous debates on industry the curious fact that few leading Conservatives have any personal experience of manufacturing industry. Let us look at the backgrounds of the six signatories to the motion in the dim and distant days before they fell on evil times and became professional Conservatives.

The Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), was a business consultant. The shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), was an oil analyst. The shadow President of the Board of Trade, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), was an investment adviser. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) was a barrister, as was the hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot). The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) was a farmer, an accountant and a finance director.

All those professions are extremely respectable—if I had a daughter who wanted to marry one of them, I should say, "By all means. My son-in-law the oil analyst—why not?"—but it is curious that the parliamentary Conservative party is unable to find a single manufacturer in its ranks to sign the motion.

That might explain why the previous Government and the current shadow Cabinet have managed to get so far out of touch with British industry. I shall not go into the question of sterling, because almost all the other speakers have addressed it; but I have spoken with many managers in Broxtowe, and I should like to say a couple of words about the other points on the charge sheet assembled by the Opposition.

The motion claims that managers are worried about taxes, but not one of the Broxtowe managers to whom I spoke cited tax as an issue that worried them—on the contrary, they feel that the reduction in corporation tax is helpful to industry. Taxation does not appear to be a problem for them.

The motion also alleges that managers are alarmed by social and labour law legislation. None of the Broxtowe managers has evinced any such concern, with the exception of a firm run by an exclusive Christian group called the Brethren, which believes that the Bible forbids it to recognise trade unions. If Conservative Members wish to promote that group, that is fine, but I have not heard them mention it. Perhaps they are saving that argument for the wind-up speech.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) made an interesting point. He said that he wondered whether, in the present regime, overseas companies would wish to pursue inward investment in Britain.

Unlike the sponsors of the motion, I have recent experience of management in a large overseas-based multinational manufacturing company. I spoke to the chairman after seeing advertisements placed in the local press by the former Conservative Government, which said that companies should invest in Britain because our wage rates were low and there were few restrictions on employers.

I felt a little ashamed that we should be openly advertising ourselves as an ideal home for sweatshops, but I asked the chairman whether those arguments would persuade him to increase UK investment. His reply was revealing. He said that, other things being equal, lower wage rates were welcome, but that, at that time, there were two problems in Britain which were significant barriers to investment: the poor state of infrastructure, especially in the universities; and the low average quality of education, which made it hard to get the staff needed for high-quality precision manufacturing.

Given that background, I whole-heartedly welcome the new Government's focus on creating an environment for education and training that surpasses that of our foreign competitors. I particularly welcome the emphasis on support for research and development, which the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry has made his own.

British business needs four things from Government, regardless of the Government's political complexion. First, it needs a stable economic environment focused on

[Dr. Nick Palmer]

long-term growth, as emphasised so many times by the Chancellor. Secondly, it needs an education system that delivers the expertise needed for competitiveness. That is the focus of the policies put forward by the Department for Education and Employment. Thirdly, it needs a financial environment that rewards enterprise and venture capital investment, as stressed by the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry when we debated that matter a few weeks ago. Finally, it needs a social and environmental policy framework that makes clear what is expected of it, and is not subject to constant change. That is another commitment of this Government.

The new Labour Government are committed to all four elements, which is why business in Broxtowe, as in Britain in general, is predominantly behind the Government as they take our country into a future that matches the industrial glories of the past.

9.28 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): It was kind of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) to go into the biographical details of those who signed the motion, but he was wrong to assert that none of us has manufacturing experience. He mentioned that I have a business background, but I spent 10 years in manufacturing before coming to this House, and am now a director of a manufacturing company, an interest that I am proud to declare in such a debate.

More generally, almost all my right hon. and hon. Friends who signed the motion have more manufacturing and business experience than the entire Department of Trade and Industry Front Bench. Therefore, Conservative Members think that we know what we are talking about, and we have heard some excellent speeches from my right hon. and hon. Friends this evening.

We have on our hands a betrayal of everything for which Labour said they stood when in opposition. We are used to broken promises from Labour on taxation, but their betrayal of the manufacturing interest is probably the greatest. When they were in opposition, no speech made by Labour Members was complete without reference to the central importance of the manufacturing sector. They always called for lower interest rates, more investment, intervention of one sort or another, but now that they are in office, they have no strategy whatever. That has been noticed not just by hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, but more generally.

I was interested in a debate in another place last week, in which Lord Paul—a new Labour peer—finished his speech by saying:

"There is a cynicism creeping into the minds of UK manufacturers that this Government are indifferent to the fate of manufacturing industry".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 April 1998; Vol. 587, c. 298.]

That has been shown again this evening.

The President of the Board of Trade, in her somewhat petulant and shrill speech, showed that she had no idea whether she was on the side of those who still believe manufacturing to be important, or whether she thinks that manufacturing is no longer sufficiently cool to engage the interest of Ministers. I personally thought that it was one of the weakest performances from the Dispatch Box that I have ever heard on a subject of this importance. It showed the shallowness of the Government's entire approach. They have no strategy.

On reflection, perhaps we should not be too surprised at that, because one of the first things that the Government did, four days after the general election, was to give away the power to decide interest rates—a central lever of the economy. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer transferred the decision-making power to the Bank of England, he did so without telling the House, without consulting anyone outside, and in defiance of what was in the Labour manifesto.

In Labour's business manifesto, which we all know was more important than their main manifesto—

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle) *rose*—

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I give way to the Minister.

Mr. Battle: Will the right hon. Gentleman say whether he prefers that decision? Is it not the case that many companies, including his own, welcome it?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall come to the attitude of companies in a moment. I make the point—it is interesting that the Minister does not deny this—that, in its business manifesto, Labour said that it would set up an advisory committee in the Bank of England, but that decisions would continue to be taken by the Treasury; so it was another broken promise when, four days after the general election, the Chancellor transferred these powers to the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, in advance of any legislation.

We warned of the dangers, and the confusion that we predicted in the Monetary Policy Committee has occurred. It has broken up into two unarmed camps: the hawks and the doves. The hawks believe that further increases in interest rates are required. The doves believe that interest rates should remain the same.

The Monetary Policy Committee's discussions are conducted semi-publicly, but it has raised in the minds of economic commentators and the markets the probability of further interest rate rises to come, which has further strengthened the pound and further damaged exporters and the manufacturing sector generally. That point was graphically made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who has long experience of these matters. We are the fifth biggest trading nation in the world, and markets that are relinquished by the failure to compete on price are difficult to re-establish.

Dr. Palmer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me? He has made his speech. I hope to reply to some of his points in due course.

There are reports that the Government, and more specifically the Cabinet, have split on this issue into those who still believe that something should be done about manufacturing, and those who do not. The attitude of the President of the Board of Trade remains a mystery.

We also warned at the time that there was a danger that monetary policy would diverge from fiscal policy; that the MPC would have an overriding concern to counter inflation by higher interest rates, while the Chancellor and the Government would pull policy in another direction. Those warnings came not just from my party, but from other parties. Indeed, I recognise one or two Labour Members who made precisely the same points.

The Government did not listen. That is hardly surprising, because Labour Members do not take the House seriously any more: they never attend debates such as this. But it has happened again. There is now a divergence between what the Chancellor, in two Budgets, has done in regard to taxation—and in regard to savings in particular—and what the Monetary Policy Committee is trying to do in the Bank of England.

In those two Budgets, we have seen an attack on savings. The £5 billion raid on pension funds—which is now to be an annual event—is the precise opposite of what the Government should have done last year. They should have encouraged savings, especially in the light of the huge windfalls that consumers were receiving from building societies and insurance companies following flotations.

The Government compounded the problem with the muddle over tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans. They relented on that, and we had a U-turn; but individual savings accounts will still be subject to an annual limit that is less than half what people can currently save through PEPs and TESSAs. By taxing savings and deterring savers, the Government put all the burden of the anti-inflation strategy on to the Bank of England. That is why we have had five interest rate rises since the election, and an uncompetitively high pound. It has been bad for mortgage holders, bad for investment and bad for exporters.

All that is described in the finer print of the Red Book—the Financial Statement published at the time of the Budget. It is laid out in the Red Book that the savings ratio is

"expected to decline over the next three years."

The Red Book also mentions business investment, about which we have heard so much criticism this evening. Apparently it has been

"rising as a share of GDP since 1994."

So much for the assertion that it fell constantly during our term of office.

The Red Book also states:

"Overall, business investment is forecast to decelerate this year".

"Decelerate" is one of those wonderful words that actually mean something different. "Decelerate" really means that business investment will be cut this year. It is one of the understatements for which the Treasury is famous.

On page 95, the Red Book says:

"the outlook for the traded goods sector is difficult . . . with imports of goods in the fourth quarter of 1997 up 10¼ per cent. on a year earlier."

There we have it. We know that the Prime Minister has not read the Red Book, but we have. We know from the Chancellor himself that savings are set to decline, that investment is set to decline, that imports are going up, that industry is contracting, and that the Government's inflation targets—even on their own figures—will not be met until the end of next year.

We have a highly distorted economy. Services and consumption are buoyant, while manufacturers and exporters are on the brink of a recession. In today's debate, one or two hon. Members said that everything would be all right, because we now have stability. Indeed, the Chancellor has said more than once that he wants to end the cycle of boom and bust. He has done so by having both simultaneously: we have a boom in the consumer market, and a potential bust—certainly, we are on the brink of a bust—in the manufacturing and exporting sector.

There is another point, which again has been made by my hon. Friends. According to the Governor of the Bank of England, about half the rise in sterling can be attributed to the weakness of the euro. In other words, sterling is now a currency of refuge. Quite simply, a fudged euro will be a weak euro, which means a relatively strong pound.

What are the Government doing? Nothing. Despite holding the six-month presidency of the European Union, neither the Prime Minister nor the Chancellor of the Exchequer shows the slightest interest in ensuring that the treaty convergence criteria are adhered to. The Bundesbank report lays out the fudging in graphic detail. Italy will have to run a budget surplus of 2.2 per cent. for the next 10 years to reach the required 60 per cent. debt level, but it is not even planning a balanced budget, so the chance of meeting the entry criteria is extremely remote.

The Prime Minister says that a range of criteria must be considered. Cannot the Government understand that fudging the entry criteria may do terrible, or even irreparable, damage to our manufacturing industry? If the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do not at least try to insist during their chairmanship of meetings that treaty requirements must be adhered to, we shall conclude that their reputation as European fixers is more important than their aim of preventing damage to the constituent economies of the European Union or that of the United Kingdom.

Damage is caused directly to the manufacturing sector not by the high value of the pound, but by taxation and regulations. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) graphically described the damage caused by over-regulation. I must mention the £20 billion extra tax burden on British industry laid out for the duration of this Parliament, the pensions tax, the early instalments of corporation tax, the double increase in diesel duty, and the stamp duty increases, all of which hit businesses harder than home owners and add to the burdens on the manufacturing sector when the Government have announced a welfare-to-work programme that relies on such firms to deliver jobs.

The Government have the cheek to claim credit for the competitiveness, flexibility and success that British firms have built up over the past 18 years, but trade union reforms, privatisations and the creation of a dynamic and flexible labour market were opposed throughout by the Labour party. The only reform or policy it supported was our entry of the exchange rate mechanism. The Conservative party has learnt the lesson about that, but the Labour party has not.

The Government have been lucky. They have inherited a golden legacy, but their response is to tax savings and businesses, to regulate and to interfere. Alongside that is

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

neglect of and indifference to the damage that is being caused by the strength of the pound—almost fatalism about it.

If there is even a vestigial concern among Labour Members about the manufacturing sector, they should show it by joining us in the Lobby.

9.43 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): After 11 years as a Member of Parliament, I am amazed at the Opposition's new-found interest in manufacturing—although it is welcome.

Conservative Members have used the word "manufacturing" as a cover for a debate on the euro: most of the speech of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) was against the single European currency, and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) resigned as a Treasury Minister before the last election because he disagreed with the then Chancellor's policy—but tonight he said how marvellous it was. After a cursory introductory reference to manufacturing, the shadow President of the Board of Trade moved on to his usual hang-up with the euro. The debate has been a run-out for the Eurosceptics, in case they find that their leader is backsliding again. It is a little late in the day for Conservative Members to promote manufacturing, given the fact that, for almost two decades, they deliberately ran down, if not wrote off, the manufacturing sector.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) was a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry. In my 10 years in the House, I do not recall him mentioning the word "manufacturing" in his speeches, yet he claims that he regularly reminded us that manufacturing created the wealth that the nation needed.

Mr. Page: Would it be convenient for me to send the hon. Gentleman copies of all my speeches on manufacturing, and would he please acknowledge receipt of them?

Mr. Battle: As the President of the Board of Trade said, one or two lone voices in the Conservative party spoke up for manufacturing, but the hon. Gentleman was not one of them. I should be delighted to receive the full raft of his speeches in the House on manufacturing, because I am confident that he did not make many.

When the noble Lord Young was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, he was challenged on Tory policies that undermined manufacturing. In my own city of Leeds, engineering, printing and textiles provided employment for more than 100 years. In the early 1980s, he advised great manufacturing centres such as Leeds to abandon manufacturing and to concentrate on services. His immortal words were that the centres of manufacturing would thrive if only more people would eat out. That was his policy. He advised us that we would economically survive by cutting each other's hair and eating at McDonald's. In the meantime, there was a slump in manufacturing from 52 per cent. of the economy to 22 per cent.

I am glad that, late in the day, the Conservatives are telling us that manufacturing is crucial to economic prosperity. We have known that for decades. Some of the industries to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) referred were written off by the Tories as traditional, but the steel industry has moved towards the 21st century with new technology. What did we get from 18 years of Conservative government? We had bust, boom and bust again: short-term expediency rather than long-term commitment. Manufacturing under the Tories was hammered by two savage recessions, and damaged by an unsustainable boom in between.

The Tories kept telling us that their macro-economic policy was set within a medium-term financial strategy. The problem with the objectives of their monetary and fiscal policies was that they changed with bewildering frequency. Nowhere was their confusion greater than on the subject of exchange rates. First Chancellor Nigel Lawson went, and then Norman Lamont resigned. The Tories believed that the exchange rate would find its own level, and that it was an important indicator of monetary conditions. That led to the shadowing of the deutschmark. Then they argued that we could not buck the market, and they joined the exchange rate mechanism. Two years later, we were ejected from the ERM at a cost to the country of £10 billion in a single afternoon. They now have the nerve to tell us about economic policy.

As a result of the confusion, the pound went on a rollercoaster ride. Under two Prime Ministers and four Chancellors, the rate of sterling against the deutschmark changed a mere 87 times. That is the Tory record.

Mr. Hammond: Does the Minister acknowledge that there is an immediate problem for manufacturing industry? What advice would he give to manufacturing companies that are on the brink of having to make substantial redundancies because they are becoming uncompetitive? That is happening now, not in history.

Mr. Battle: I shall willingly deal with the hon. Gentleman's point if he will allow me to continue my speech. We should put it clearly on the record where the Conservative party comes from, because the boom and bust cycle that it created between 1989 and 1993 cost us 1 million manufacturing jobs. The last thing that the industry wants now is a return to those short-term, boom-bust, stop-go policies of the past.

The Conservative Government did little to promote manufacturing, and many of their actions were damaging. As a result of 18 years of Conservative Government, manufacturing shrank by a quarter in relation to the economy as a whole. Some 2.5 million jobs were lost, and the Conservative Government were totally indifferent to that. They did not say a word about manufacturing.

Of course we fully recognise the worries of manufacturers about the current exchange rate. I met representatives of the worsted textile industry in my constituency on Saturday. We appreciate that they are under pressure, but it is accepted that we need a stable and competitive framework over the medium and longer term. We have the right policies to achieve that. I recall the freely given and much publicised expert advice in the months before the general election. What did all the experts advise and agree on? They claimed that the only certainty other than death if a Labour Government were elected was that the pound would sink. They said that it would go through the floor.

The experts all predicted a fall in the pound consequent on the election of a Labour Government. To be fair, there was some precedent. Every previous Labour Government have come under incredible economic pressure, and everyone expected downward pressure on the pound. Conservative Members spelled that out day after day in the election campaign. What has happened? Who predicted that a Labour Government would face the problem of the pound being too strong?

The Conservatives do not know where they stand on the issue. On 30 October 1989, just after Nigel Lawson resigned, the then Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher, declared on television:

"I like a strong pound."

Now the shadow President of the Board of Trade campaigns for a weak pound, but at that time, he claimed that Baroness Thatcher was right. He has obviously changed his mind. Conservative Members with their selective amnesia seem to forget that sterling's value against the deutschmark increased by 20 per cent. between May 1996 and May 1997. Some 70 per cent. of the present increase is due to the actions of the Government at that time, and, of course, we have inherited that sterling time bomb.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am sorry to interrupt the Minister's rampage through history. Is he not aware—I presume from his complacent performance that he is not—that some of my constituents with businesses in Trafford Park are already laying people off because of the Government's policies? They will not be satisfied by the complacent remarks of the Secretary of State and the Minister. Will the Minister tell us what the Government intend to do about that problem?

Mr. Battle: Some of us recall the lay-offs in Trafford Park under the previous Government. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will remember the words of a former Conservative Chancellor who, just before the election, said:

"We have a floating exchange rate at the moment and, for that reason, I do not control its level. Finance Ministers do not control the level of exchange rates in today's deregulated . . . markets."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1997; Vol. 292, c. 491-92.]

We are entitled to ask Opposition Members whether they agree with that or whether they now take a different view. As usual, they are at sixes and sevens. Some of them say, "Join the EMU early," while others are mortally opposed. Some say, "Put taxes up," while others say, "Put taxes down." Some say, "We want further fiscal tightening," while others say, "Not any more." They are all over the place—deeply divided, uncertain and never sure which way to face. Their position is muddled, inconsistent and incredible.

Mr. Paterson: The Minister's historical rant is simply not good enough. *[Interruption.]* People working in businesses and on farms are worried sick that they will become unemployed because the Minister and the Secretary of State will not give the Chancellor a clear recommendation about what will do manufacturing good. At what level would they like to see the exchange rate?

Mr. Battle: I seem to recall that today's debate is on an Opposition motion.

In 1995, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—during his perennial leadership campaign—said:

"at my first Cabinet meeting, I'd ask what could we cease doing".

After demonstrating that smack of firm, threatening leadership, he went on to declare:

"Those who answer well will have good prospects under me."

There we have it. The right hon. Gentleman may regale us with his empty rhetoric, but he will do nothing.

What action would the right hon. Member for Wokingham take? He mutters about savings, but—despite those mutterings—the personal savings ratio is rising under our Labour Government. Would he tighten even further the Government's fiscal stance, and cut spending on education and health? Is that what he is telling us? Would he increase personal taxation? He is a do-nothing man, whose practical advice is worthless.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the savings ratio. May I refer him to the Government's own document—the Red Book—which clearly shows the savings ratio peaking in 1997, falling in 1998, falling further in 1999 and falling even further in 2000, when it runs off the map?

Mr. Battle: That intervention was made by a man who was a Minister in a Government under whom savings fell to 6 per cent. Tell us about it.

The Government understand the worries of manufacturers. Moreover, since day one, we have been providing an environment in which businesses can prosper. We have cut the main corporation tax rate and exempted small and medium-sized companies—about which some hon. Members have expressed some concern in this debate. We have reformed capital gains tax, and established a new enterprise investment scheme. We are investing in skills and training, and have established a university for industry. We have also introduced a university challenge fund. We are introducing major initiatives to get investment in research and development and to encourage longer-term investments. We shall stick with our strategy, and not be bounced by cribbing Conservative Members—who have not a clue what to do, and cannot even make up their own minds.

Long-term investment rates are already lower, and manufacturing output is holding up. Yes, although we share some concerns with industry, we are determined to build a stable economic framework and to break the boom-bust cycle.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Battle: No.

I should like to know how Conservative Members have the gall, nerve and bare-faced cheek even to mention manufacturing. The right hon. Member for Wells mentioned cynicism. However, Conservative Members—who belong to a party that is without principle or policy—have tabled a cynical and opportunist motion. Conservative Members cannot even make up their minds what to do on those matters. For them to table that motion really takes the biscuit. In

[Mr. Battle]

government, Conservative Members worked to eliminate manufacturing, although they did not mention that today.

I got the impression from the speech of the shadow President of the Board of Trade that he wants to set our exchange rate in a vacuum, as if we could do that in the context of a world economy. Such a desire is simply bizarre, and a case of, "Don't adjust your brain; there's a fault in reality."

Our policies are designed to rebuild our manufacturing base and to ensure that it has a future. I hope that hon. Members will reject the cynical words in the Opposition's motion, which are simply a cover to allow the Eurosceptics another ride. Conservative Members' interest in manufacturing is as shallow as the words of their motion.

I urge hon. Members to vote for the Government's amendment, which states how our policies will rebuild our manufacturing base and establish skills and training, which are a factor in our manufacturing's ability to compete. Our policies will ensure that there is investment in research and development, which declined under the previous Government. They left office with less investment in research and development than when they came to power. It is our policies that will rebuild our manufacturing base and ensure that it has a future, not the cynical opportunism that we see in the Conservative party motion. I recommend the amendment in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 333.

Division No. 245] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ames, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony

Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House deplores the Opposition's attempt to criticise the economic management of the Government as a feeble attempt to cover up their own appalling record of economic mis-management;

notes that under the Conservatives Britain slumped in the world prosperity league, saw the slowest period of growth since World War II, saw higher average inflation than in any other major industrialised country bar Italy, and had the lowest level of investment of any of the 24 OECD countries; also notes that the Conservatives left office with manufacturing investment lower than it was when they came to power, left Britain's share of world trade at its lowest ever, gave Britain a deficit on manufacturing trade for the first time ever, saw thousands of manufacturing firms go under due to their boom and bust policies, more than doubled the level of unemployment in their period in office, and left behind not a golden economic legacy, but an economy and public finances facing real difficulties; congratulates the Government on its prompt actions such as promoting the competitiveness agenda and fostering investment in R & D and innovation, and creating an open and transparent framework for monetary and fiscal policy to secure a platform of stability for growth and employment; and notes that the Government is addressing the problems which the Conservative Government left behind with positive practical proposals to take the nation into the 21st century.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

COMMISSION WHITE PAPER ON RENEWABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY AND ENERGY FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5140/98, a Commission White Paper entitled Energy for the Future: Renewable Sources of Energy, the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum on the Council Resolution on Renewable Sources of Energy submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 16th March 1998, and European Community Document No. 13035/97, Annex I (a draft Decision adopting a multiannual framework programme for actions in the energy sector (1998–2002)), Annex IV (a draft Decision adopting a multiannual framework programme for the promotion of renewable energy sources in the Community: ALTENER II (1998–2002)), Annex V (a draft Decision adopting a multiannual programme for the promotion of energy efficiency (1998–2002): SAVE II), and Annex VI (a draft Decision adopting a multiannual programme of technological actions promoting the clean and efficient use of solid fuels: CARNOT (1998–2002)); and supports the Government's view that actions should be taken to promote a greater use of renewable energy within Europe, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, and that measures to promote renewables should be compatible with the need to restrain public expenditure and avoid disproportionate costs for consumers and industry; and supports the Government's view that EU spending programmes with an energy component should, as far as practicable, be brought together in a framework programme to improve co-ordination and transparency.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 8th April, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until she shall have notified the Royal Assent to Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

PETITION

Green Belt (Surrey)

10.12 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I beg leave to present a petition signed by more than 5,000 residents of east Surrey, expressing their concern about the threat of large-scale new developments in the green belt and countryside. The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that more homes are built in city areas, instead of the countryside or Green Belt, to breathe new life into our cities and to protect valuable countryside for future generations.

To lie upon the Table.

Electronic Government

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

10.13 pm

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): At the outset, I should make clear that I am not an information technology anorak—with the greatest respect to all those who understand the details of all things technological and digital. I secured this debate because I believe that we are on the cusp of a quiet revolution—a revolution in which electronic government can enable us to reinvent government in the way in which we provide public services and reinvigorate democracy. The opportunities of electronic government can enable more efficient delivery of services, greater transparency and access to information, and have potential to empower the citizen and transform democracy.

My passion for the potential for electronic government dates from 1994. It arose due to my concern, as the then leader of Lewisham council, about low levels of participation in local government and low voter turnout. I recognised the need to transform our services, breaking down old departmental divisions and bringing services closer to people. The need to enhance our citizens' role in decision making is also key.

In 1994, we started the democracy project—the "Lewisham Listens" experiment—using new technology to put citizens at the heart of government and enhance local democracy. The experiment included community forums, one of the first citizens' juries, a community plan, video boxes, one of the first council community websites, an award-winning European funded teledemocracy project using interactive IT, and teletalk, using video conferencing in libraries to increase access to services and receive our citizens' views on any aspect of our work.

Subsequently, GALA was developed, providing interactive television kiosks around the borough and in shopping centres, covering health, education, local environment, transport and tourism. Although I was accused by some of my colleagues of encouraging couch-potato democracy, I believe that we learned a great deal and showed that local government is on the leading edge of electronic government.

Since then, of course, electronic government has moved on, with Bristol's plans for a digital city, for example. In my constituency, the Ladman partnership involving Luton and South Bedfordshire councils, Cabletel, Luton university and Luton airport will assist economic regeneration by training and networking local and worldwide business. It also plans to provide free e-mail for all.

Until now, local government's attempts to develop electronic government have been hindered by lack of support from central Government—but no longer. The new Labour Government are promoting new government using new technology, as demonstrated by the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to ensuring that 25 per cent. of all services are electronically delivered by 2002.

The Government are already encouraging greater use of new technologies by business, such as the electronic form for the self-employed, which I saw piloted recently at NatWest in Luton. In education and training, £350 million has been committed to the national grid for learning and the forthcoming university for industry, and in Luton alone, we received one of the largest grants in the country for our central library to increase access to IT. All that signals a Government who are committed to bringing information technology access and skills to all our community for the millennium and beyond.

The big picture is not just a series of IT initiatives. The Government could lead a global revolution in electronic government. While some countries are galloping ahead in electronic government, such as the Malaysian Government with Malaysia on-line, our United Kingdom information and communication technologies infrastructure is peerless, we are information-rich, and we lead our European counterparts by several leagues. The real challenge for us now is to harness the full potential of the information society to get maximum gain for all our people. The "Better Government" White Paper offers such opportunities. It could lead the way in a fundamental change in the relationship between citizen and government.

The deep sense of disillusionment with government, which prompted my democracy project in 1994, remains. Restoring faith in and reinvigorating democracy remains the most important challenge for all politicians.

Transforming public services via electronic government to provide "joined-up " government will be crucial in that democratic renewal. However, that alone is not enough, and therein lies the real challenge in which electronic government has a key role. The challenges seem to be—first, how do we re-engineer government in a way which has a bottom-up approach and which allows Government to maximise citizen participation?

Secondly, how do we ensure that information is available to citizens in a way which empowers? In the last few weeks, we have seen the development of intelligent mark-up so that citizen access could be improved. Government must have a strategy on this, and recognise, for example, that it may mean that the old methods of civil servants drafting Green and White Papers is obsolete. More important may be how information is tagged, so access, usable information and maximum use of IT infrastructure are key.

Thirdly, the Government need to use the developments in technology. IT's development has a hard commercial edge, but the Government should be hitching a ride to advance electronic government. They can do so by providing vision and leadership and by acting as a kind parent, setting down guidelines for the industry to govern itself and using opportunities to enhance public service and democratic participation. The development of digital broadcasting is such an opportunity. Interactive television in every living room could be used for lifelong learning and citizen participation, particularly by usually excluded groups.

The opportunities are endless. It is not just about voting at Tesco or consultation by cashpoint—there is the development of e-democracy, electronic town meetings, interactive participation and priorities for local government, or using our plans for pre-legislative scrutiny to include electronic and digital consultation. The rewards are great, as we discovered in assessing the democracy project. Using new technology to involve citizens in decision-making works. The proof that it overcomes apathy and is an important new democratic tool is the 95 per cent. satisfaction rate recorded.

[Ms Margaret Moran]

The fourth challenge to the Government—one which they are already seizing through investment in IT in schools and libraries—is access. However, the IT-rich and poor are not as obvious as some would believe. Digital broadcasting will revolutionise access, but there is evidence that, where IT access is promoted, it is young people, women and older unemployed citizens who get involved. The Lewisham democracy project showed that teletalk and teledemocracy pilots were particularly well used by people with disabilities and people with English as a second language, and that over half the teletalkers were over 50, with black and ethnic minorities over-represented.

It is no coincidence that the school most advanced in IT in my constituency—for which I performed a virtual launch of its website recently—is Dallow junior. Some 98 per cent. of the pupils are Kashmiri or Bangladeshi, who live in one of the most deprived areas in the UK, where, in some homes, an inside loo is a luxury, let alone a computer. I also welcome the initiative of schools such as Stopsley junior, which is opening its doors to the community to take part in the IT revolution.

The final challenge is to Parliament. We are in danger of becoming the IT-poor. Can we lead electronic government while this place is so far behind? I believe that it is not just for the Government but for each of us to lead in the electronic government project. For those who wish to lead by example, I would say, "Please help, not hinder." For example, I hope that we will make it easier for all Members to develop community websites. My website—the Luton democracy pages, at www.enablis.co.uk/margaret moran—is a small contribution.

My thanks go to the pupils from Surrey Street school, who won my competition to design a website poster. My website and my on-line interface between Westminster and my constituency attempt to provide links to local businesses and schools and to provide community networks. I will be holding virtual surgeries on the site soon. Watch out, Luton—I have plans for a cyber soap box in Luton town centre. Eat your heart out, John-boy. So, is the next step the virtual Member of Parliament? My answer is resoundingly no—not if we take up the challenge of the electronic and digital world.

10.24 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) for initiating this debate on electronic government. I readily share her enthusiasm for new technology and how it can be used to improve the quality and efficiency of public services. I must confess that, like her, I am not an expert, but nevertheless it is our function as elected representatives—certainly for those of us in government—to recognise the opportunities presented to us by developments in electronics, to increase the efficiency of our public services.

In particular, I congratulate my hon. Friend on her time as leader of Lewisham council which, as she remarked, used the teletalk project to pioneer the use of electronic kiosks, to provide information about local services. I do not think that she will mind if I say that Lewisham is quite an advanced council in that context. Certainly, it has also set up a citizens panel that bears marked similarities to the people's panel that we have established. As she also pointed out, she is a keen on-line Member of Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was one of the judges of the competition that she set up for local kids, to design a poster advertising her parliamentary website.

Developments in information technology make what we call joined-up government possible in ways not even imagined 10 years ago. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech to the Labour party conference last October, we are planning an IT revolution with the aim that a quarter of the services that Government provide can be delivered electronically within five years. We must remember that our economic competitors are doing likewise. The United States certainly has ambitious aspirations for the delivery of electronic government.

Clearly, people want efficient and effective service that is easy to access and flexible enough to deal with their particular situation, and it is equally clear that the public sector is being left behind by advances in the range and quality of the services provided by the private sector. We recognise that the plain fact is that ordinary users of public services—services with which people come into contact almost every day—do not differentiate between the parts of Government that provide them.

It is not important that it is the local authority or Government agency, one Whitehall Department or another. What the citizen and small business want is more effective service, with greater and more user-friendly access to information and services. It is no secret that, for the vast majority of people in Britain, Government services could be that bit better. They could be that bit more modern and that bit more like the private sector services to which people have become attuned.

As a Government, we are determined to see an end to the current situation, when people on benefit have to inform up to six agencies if they move house, businesses have to cope with up to 10 different inspectors and young people have 11 bits of Government to go to for help and assistance. That is why the forthcoming "Better Government" White Paper will be about simplifying those encounters. It will be about turning government the right way up—starting with the individual, family or business that needs a service rather than with the professional, the administrator or indeed the politician who provides it.

Above all, "Better Government" will be about redesigning Government services, so that they truly focus on the citizen, and we intend to use technology to achieve that. The Government see internet and intranet services and technologies as the key to the successful delivery of user-friendly Government services to the citizen and business, particularly the small business. We are already widely using intranet technologies within Departments.

In addition, central Departments now have the potential to access the newly established Government secure intranet, which enables secure interconnections across a range of departmental IT systems. The GSI will facilitate a more coherent, customer-focused and integrated electronic service delivery to citizens and businesses, by providing security for information that is entrusted to the Government and by allowing unrestricted access to the internet where required. The service is currently being used by a number of Departments, and others are expected to join during 1998.

The GSI enables Departments to communicate securely by e-mail and to benefit from access to, and the ability to receive communications over, the internet. It will also support directory and other intranet services. It should enable the Government to exploit more fully their knowledge and databases, to search the internet and to communicate more effectively with key users. It will also provide a means of linking up and promoting the increasing volume of Government services that are available electronically.

The infrastructure to deliver intranets is growing rapidly in the private sector. The Government believe that full advantage should be taken of that technology to link Departments to one another and to the populace at large.

The GSI is the result of a successful partnership with a private sector contractor—a partnership that offers a model for further co-operation between the public and private sectors. For that to happen, we need to work in partnership not only with IT companies, but with local government.

We are keen to encourage closer working between central and local government. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been asked to chair a ministerial committee, including local government representatives, which is specifically charged with building on our respective strengths and with delivering linked services to the ordinary person.

In initiatives such as the new deal, we are mobilising partners to deliver key changes. We have also been holding a series of seminars with participants from academia and the media, as well as from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The discussions have been stimulating, and many positive ideas have been raised. Moreover, we have invited the public sector unions to come forward with ideas on how to involve front-line staff in shaping the "Better Government" programme.

There are bound to be different organisations delivering public services, but IT will provide, first, more scope for public servants to guide people across the gaps and round the systems and, secondly, the chance for the public to do that themselves. As my hon. Friend reminded the House, central Government can learn much from localised projects and local authorities in understanding what people want from public services and how best to deliver them. That is why we established direct.link to act as a forum for public sector and voluntary bodies that are engaged in projects to provide electronic services to the citizen.

There are already many such projects throughout the United Kingdom—many of them involve local authorities, which have gained valuable experience. They are not only willing to share that experience, but want to learn from others' experience. Direct.link is the forum in which that can happen. It creates a link in the chain that we are forging to deliver better public services.

As the House will be aware, we have set up a series of pilot schemes to test public reaction to electronic service delivery. In December, we launched the latest of those projects—the intelligent form—which is being piloted in six locations, including my hon. Friend's constituency.

The new pilot uses clever-forms software, the internet and digital signatures. It helps someone to register as self-employed, by cutting down on the unnecessary duplication of effort and on the number of forms to be filled in. In the not too distant past, people wanting to register as self-employed had six forms to complete for three Government Departments—the intelligent form enables them to do that in one go.

The intelligent form is also a partnership. The Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency worked not only with Microsoft and Electronic Data Systems, but with banks, in whose branches the citizen can access the service.

The intelligent form is an example of "Better Government" in action, working across public and private boundaries to focus on a particular life episode. Not only does that allow people to submit information to Government over the internet securely, quickly and accurately, but for the first time complex legal, administrative and technological obstacles have been overcome to produce the first Government-recognised electronic signature. Of course, the potential for application elsewhere is huge.

Last week, we published the interim report on our market research into public attitudes towards electronic government. Respondents were extremely positive about the possibility of electronic delivery of Government services. The message to us is clear: the public expect Government to use information technology to enhance the quality of their lives, not only to make things easier, but to open up new opportunities for them.

That is precisely what we intend to do. We are confident that our "Better Government" programme, with its emphasis on new technology, will set the pace not only in this country but overseas, as we turn our vision for the 21st century of electronic government into a reality at the service of all our people.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 April 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Middle East

1. **Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): What steps he intends to take to assist the progress of a peace settlement in the middle east. [36528]

7. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If he will make a statement on the progress of the middle east peace process during the British presidency of the European Union. [36536]

12. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What is his assessment of the current position of the peace process in the middle east; and if he will make a statement. [36543]

19. **Mr. James Clappison** (Hertsmere): If he will make a statement on progress in the middle east peace process. [36552]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I visited five capitals in the middle east and the headquarters of the Palestine National Authority last month. In Gaza, I emphasised our commitment to security and announced the formation of a European and Palestinian joint committee on security. In Israel, I stressed the importance of progress on the basis of land for peace and the long-standing opposition of Britain and Europe to the expansion of settlements that were in conflict with that principle. In Syria and Lebanon, I discussed their response to the Israeli proposals for withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Throughout the middle east, there was a warm welcome for the decision of the European Union, under the British presidency, to extend its financial support for the peace process and for our efforts to break the deadlock on interim steps such as the Gaza airport, sea port and industrial estate.

The forthcoming visit to the middle east by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will further demonstrate the priority that we attach to restoring progress to the peace process. It remains our objective to secure a peace settlement that will offer security and justice to both the Palestinian and Israeli people.

Mr. Hanson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his full reply. I particularly thank him for his efforts in pressing British, European and United Nations policy on the illegal settlements in the occupied territories and his support for the Oslo principles. Will he confirm—I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will confirm this in his forthcoming visit—that a moratorium on illegal settlements is necessary to secure peace and security in the region?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that it has been the long-standing policy of both this Government and the previous one to oppose the expansion of settlements in the occupied territories. The Israeli Housing Minister has announced that he may proceed with 4,400 houses in the west bank this year. Most of the people of Israel understand that any gain there may be in respect of their housing is more than offset by the great damage that such expansion does to the prospects for a peace settlement that is as much in their interests as it is for the people of Palestine.

Mr. Luff: At a time when we are rightly celebrating the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the state of Israel, will the Foreign Secretary resist his penchant for gesture politics, which he sadly demonstrated on his recent visit to Israel? Will he instead seek to learn the lessons of the previous Government, who were anxious to offer practical assistance to all parties engaged in finding a peaceful solution to the problems of the middle east? In that context, may I commend to him the interview with the Prime Minister of Israel in one of today's national newspapers and ask him to consider seriously the possibility of offering practical secure corridors between the different parties in the middle east to help achieve a peaceful outcome?

Mr. Cook: We have several times offered to assist in achieving safe passageways, particularly in the southern area. We stand ready to assist in any interim step that would help to boost confidence between both sides. It is very important that we restore confidence and trust to make progress once again. It has not been easy to achieve such agreement, but I am happy to pursue any opening that is given us by the Prime Minister of Israel.

Mr. Llwyd: I consider the Foreign Secretary's conduct on his recent trip to the middle east entirely appropriate. Does he agree that the greatest stumbling block to a lasting peace in the middle east is the fact that Israel continually sets up settlements on disputed land?

Mr. Cook: On my visit to Har Homa, I am absolutely clear that I was right to underline the long-standing opposition of Britain and Europe to the expansion of settlements on occupied territory. I fully agree with Lord Hurd, who said at the time that I was right to proceed with the visit because to abandon the visit would have been to show that I was abandoning the policy.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Was it not clear from the start that my right hon. Friend was going

not just in his own right and on behalf of this country, but as the representative of the EU presidency, and that any snub was a snub to the EU initiative as a whole? Therefore, how does he see the EU initiative proceeding in light of that visit, and particularly in relation to the US initiative?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that my visit to the middle east—and particularly to Har Homa—achieved the full support of my colleagues throughout the EU, and has had much support throughout Europe. On the US visit, we have been in close consultation with the US authorities, and I have discussed the matter a number of times with Madeleine Albright. While I was in the middle east, I pressed the leaders of the Palestinian authority and the Israeli Government to give a positive response to the proposals when they come forward. It is important that we get both round the negotiating table, knowing that the US proposals have the double authority of the US and the EU.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I offer my congratulations and support to the Foreign Secretary on his recent visit to the middle east, which has done a great deal to restore the reputation of Her Majesty's Government throughout the region? Will the Foreign Secretary take the opportunity today to underline the fact that the British Government and Parliament have no quarrel with the Israeli people, but rather with the Israeli Government and the policies they pursue—particularly their rejection of the agreement reached at Oslo, based on the principle of land for peace? If, as appears to be the case, the Israeli Government are willing to implement the obligations contained in UN resolution 425—withdrawal from the Lebanon—would it not be logical and right for them to accept also the obligations contained in UN resolution 242, which guarantees a homeland for the Palestinian people?

Mr. Cook: The hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right that many people in Israel want the peace process to proceed. Mr. Netanyahu was elected on a commitment to peace with security. Security requires that the peace process continues and has a reasonable chance of success. Part of that process involves the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as set out in UN resolution 425, which is now 20 years old. I was interested in the proposals put to me by the Israeli Defence Minister during my visit to Jerusalem about withdrawal from southern Lebanon. I hope that it will be possible for the Israeli Government to take that forward and that it will provide a basis for unblocking the present stalemate on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): With reference to the supplementary question from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) in respect of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel, is my right hon. Friend aware that David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, who helped to found the country—and whom I knew personally—would look with contempt and revulsion at the policies of the current Israeli Government because they worked all the time for peace with their Arab neighbours? Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on his visit to Har Homa, and on the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to Gaza, where he will stay overnight? Will my right hon. Friend continue to press for a fulfilment of the Oslo accords which Netanyahu is violating?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend speaks with great authority and personal experience in this matter. I entirely agree that those who helped to create the state of Israel have greatly contributed to the success of the nation, which we salute. The security of that nation now depends on those currently in power in Israel showing the same vision as Itzhak Rabin, and recognising that one makes peace with one's enemies, and not just with one's friends.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Following his return from the middle east, why did the Foreign Secretary choose not to make a statement to the House, as is the custom? Was it because he thought his trip was unimportant, or because he does not regard it as part of his duties to account to the House for his doings?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the custom for statements to the House is that they are made when there is a policy change. There was no policy change involved in my visit to the middle east. Indeed, the policy that I enunciated throughout my visit to the middle east was the policy which Opposition Members espoused when in government. It is a pity that they do not espouse it now that they are in opposition.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his visit to Har Homa was widely applauded in the face of the unmannerly conduct of the Israeli Government? Will he continue to put pressure on them to rejoin the civilised countries of the world, among which Israel once played so notable a part?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. I think, however, that the immediate area for us to focus on now is the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit. Last week, I met the Israeli ambassador. We had a very good exchange for an hour, at the end of which he gave me an assurance that the Prime Minister would be received courteously and that his visit would be a success. I am sure that the visit will provide a way forward for us to engage Israel in the peace process and to demonstrate the underlying health of our relations with the great majority of the Israeli people.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The House would have listened with astonishment to the Foreign Secretary's novel doctrine of ministerial statements, but surely the one thing on this issue that should unite all hon. Members is the hope that the Prime Minister's visit will help to revive the peace process. Is the Foreign Secretary so pleased with his own performance that he believes that there are no lessons to be learned from it to enhance the Prime Minister's prospects of success?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and I shall try to rely on his diplomatic skills of charm and courtesy. I say to him and to the House that I am not pleased with the present state of the peace process. Indeed, I came back from the middle east deeply concerned for the peace process and by what I had heard, not only in Jerusalem but in the Arab capitals.

I have discussed the Prime Minister's visit with the Israeli ambassador. I am confident that the Prime Minister will be treated with courtesy and respect. He does go with specific proposals; we very much hope that those proposals will help to unblock the deadlock on the interim steps, which is so important for restoring confidence. It is vital for the people of Israel and the Palestinian people that we make progress, and vital for Europe, which is a major contributor to the funds of the peace process and is the next neighbour to the middle east. We also have a clear interest in achieving peace in the middle east.

Cyprus

2. **Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): What recent discussions he has had with the Turkish Government on Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [36529]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I have regular discussions with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ismail Cem. We last spoke on 26 March.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has telephoned the Turkish Prime Minister twice this year. As a result of their discussions, he has twice sent Sir David Hannay as his personal envoy to the Turkish Prime Minister for meetings which included issues to do with Cyprus.

We are seeking to establish a meeting of the Association Council in order to deepen political dialogue and economic co-operation between Europe and Turkey. It remains our firm view that Cyprus has a valid application for membership of the European Union and that the people of Cyprus are entitled to have that application judged on its merits.

Mr. McCabe: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that a great many Cypriots in this country, including in my constituency of Hall Green, who supported Labour in May 1997, will be delighted that we are maintaining yet another manifesto commitment? Will he give the House an assurance that no party outside the European Union will have a right of veto on the process of the Cypriot application for EU membership?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to report to my hon. Friend and the House that, last Tuesday, we received the Foreign Minister of Cyprus at the General Affairs Council of the European Union, when we heard for the first time the start of the negotiations between the European Union and Cyprus on its application for accession. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that no third country can have a veto on whether a sovereign state should apply for membership of the European Union, or whether the European Union should respond positively to that application.

It would, of course, greatly enhance the prospects both for Cyprus's accession and the success of that accession if, in the course of the negotiations, we could also make progress on the parallel question of the division of the island. Britain will continue to do all that it can to try to find a solution.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that a sad stumbling block regarding the current Cyprus position is the refusal by the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktas, to talk to Sir David Hannay? I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about this country's role, and particularly the EU position under our presidency, but will he take any positive steps to try to encourage Mr. Denktas to speak to Sir David Hannay?

Mr. Cook: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have repeatedly encouraged Mr. Denktas to do that and other things as well, without—as the hon. Gentleman records—receiving a positive response from Mr. Denktas. I particularly regret the fact that he flatly turned down President Clerides's offer to include representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community in a mixed delegation to negotiate on accession to the European Union. I discussed that offer with President Clerides before it was made. I believe it was a fair and a generous offer, and it is a matter of regret for the Turkish Cypriot community that its leader ruled out its participation.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

3. **Mr. Tom Levitt** (High Peak): What plans he has to promote and expand the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. [36530]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We strongly support the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. In recognition of its excellent work, we recently increased its grant in aid from £2.7 million in 1997–98 to £3 million for 1998–99.

Mr. Levitt: I am delighted to hear that answer. I have had contact with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, having hosted visits with both eastern European and African delegations in the past. The extra grant will be very welcome. Will my hon. Friend encourage the Westminster Foundation to promote contacts between British parties and their sister parties in Europe?

Mr. Lloyd: That is a little easier for the party in government than for the major Opposition party: I am not sure that the Conservatives have any friends left in Europe. There is certainly a need on both sides of the House for greater understanding of political trends throughout Europe. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is encouraging that, and we hope that the Leader of the Opposition will begin to catch up with us.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Funds from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy have been used to assist with beginning to modernise and democratise party political machinery in the Republic of Moldova. I welcome the Minister's remarks, as much remains to be done. Is it not a fact that hon. Members on both sides of the House can, and do, contribute their political experience and know-how in countries where democracy is still in its infancy? Is not the foundation the ideal conduit for that sort of exercise?

Mr. Lloyd: There is no doubt that the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy is widely respected—and not just in this country. When the chairman of the foundation, my hon. Friend the Member

for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), visited America recently, he was told that the Americans regard the foundation as being extremely high value for a relatively low cost. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) is right: the exchange between parliamentarians and other initiatives undertaken by the Westminster foundation are cementing the democratic process in many parts of former Soviet eastern Europe.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have a bit of a cheek telling the emerging nations how to practise democracy when half the British Parliament is not elected? Would it be a good idea for the new Labour Government to close down the other half that is not elected? We would then be in a position to tell the rest of the world what democracy is all about.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend knows very well that the Government intend to ensure that at least the hereditary element in the other place disappears. I must confess that the matter is not directly in my hands. We shall have to see what opposition we meet from the Conservatives and from their lordships in another place.

Kosovo

4. **Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): If he will make a statement on the situation in Kosovo. [36531]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): We vigorously condemn the excessive force used by the Serbian security forces in Kosovo in recent weeks and deeply regret the loss of lives there. As the United Kingdom has presidency of the European Union, I visited Belgrade to record our concern and I also called a meeting of the contact group in London to respond to the crisis. Our central objectives are the withdrawal of paramilitary special police from Kosovo and a meaningful dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina to secure greater autonomy and enhanced status for Kosovo.

We want to be able to accept the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the European family of democratic states, but we cannot do so unless Belgrade starts to accept modern standards of human rights and ethnic tolerance.

Mr. Tyrie: What are the Government doing to prevent the spread of conflict to Macedonia? There are currently just under 1,000 lightly armed troops in Macedonia, mainly from United States forces, but how many more do the Government think it would be appropriate for the United Nations, or possibly NATO, to deploy there?

Mr. Cook: The day after the contact group meeting, I spoke to President Gligorov of Macedonia, who particularly welcomed the commitment in our statement at the contact group that the mandate of the UN force on the border between Macedonia and Serbia be extended beyond its expiry date this June. We are working on how we can achieve that extension, and whether it should be done through the UN, NATO or other regional groupings.

I do not think that the number of troops is as significant as their symbolic force. The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) is right in saying that most of the troops are from United States forces, which gives immense confidence to Macedonia that anyone who infringes its border is taking on the United States—the numbers are less important than the clear symbolic support that they represent.

We are currently exploring with Albania and the other neighbouring states how we can also provide them with similar security and reassurance, so that we contain tensions from Kosovo and they do not spill over into a regional conflict.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): Following that reply, will my right hon. Friend say why the Albanian Government's requests for such deployment have so far been refused?

Mr. Cook: We have explored with the Albanian Government the possibility of a partnership for peace project in Albania, to demonstrate the country's close ties with NATO and NATO's close interest in it. I met the Prime Minister of Albania after the most recent contact group meeting at the end of March; we had a very useful exchange, and he warmly appreciated the strong support of Europe and the contact group for the neighbouring countries. We are determined that any continuing disruption in Kosovo will not spill over. Moreover, we are determined that Belgrade should stop behaving as it is in Kosovo, and achieve a settlement there, which is the key to securing that region's security.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Does not the Foreign Secretary agree that early action in this very dangerous area could save great grief later? Why does he not take a lead in urging that observers be stationed in Kosovo on pain of increased sanctions against Serbia if the Serbs do not agree?

Mr. Cook: First, I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point, which is exactly why I went to Belgrade the week after the killings. That is also why the contact group met within two weeks of the killings, and why the British presidency ensured that all the sanctions that were approved by the contact group on 9 March were fully implemented by the European Union within 10 days. We have acted, and we have acted with speed.

Three major sanctions are now in place against Belgrade: first, the arms embargo, which the Security Council has now cleared; secondly, a ban on visas for senior members of the Belgrade authorities; and thirdly, a freeze on credits for investment or participation in privatisations by the Serbian Government—that is vital because that is the way in which Mr. Milosevic pays for his police activities. We are committed to a further meeting at the end of the month, when we shall review progress.

On observance, we have repeatedly pressed for Pristina and Kosovo to be open to an international presence. I am pleased that, because of contact group pressure, the Red Cross was able to visit the area and to monitor what is happening. Our embassy in Belgrade regularly and routinely visits Kosovo.

Yugoslavia

6. **Mr. John Home Robertson** (East Lothian): If he will make a statement on progress towards stability and democracy in the former Yugoslavia. [36534]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We have witnessed considerable progress over recent months, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the elections in Republika Srpska last November. However, there remains a lot to be done to enhance stability before any of the countries of that region can claim to be fully democratic.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend may be aware that I have a little experience of the conflict in Bosnia. Surely the main lesson to be learned from that is that the west must take a tough line on extreme nationalism in every part of Yugoslavia. I welcome the comments that my right hon. Friend made about Serb excesses in Kosovo, but may I urge my hon. Friend not to lose sight of the appalling record of the Croatian authorities, not only in Bosnia but in Krajina? Will he take this opportunity to condemn President Tudjman's latest outburst, which keeps him very much in the same nationalistic stable as Slobodan Milosevic? Does he agree that there can be no question of Croatia's joining the family of European nations under that kind of leadership?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend rightly points out the disgraceful speech that President Tudjman made to his party congress in February, in which he played to the most unpleasant nationalistic sentiments, not only of his fellow countrymen but of the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That speech was condemned throughout the European Union. We have made it clear to President Tudjman and his Government that any movement towards Europe depends on a genuinely multi-ethnic settlement within his country, on the return of Serb refugees and others to their traditional areas, on a serious attempt at a process of reconciliation, and on a crackdown on the ethnic violence that continues to disfigure Croatia.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): On the same theme, does the Minister agree that it is vital that the Croatian Government allow Serbs to return to their former homes in Krajina and eastern Slovenia? Would not that free up homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina for other returnees? Is the Minister absolutely satisfied that the Government are doing all that they can to put pressure on the Croatian Government to remove that logjam?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is right. There is no doubt that the return of refugees is vital to the proper and full implementation of the Dayton agreement. President Tudjman is one of the parties to that agreement. It is right and proper that Serbs should be allowed to return to Croatia because it would allow the process to take place throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, where places would be liberated by Serbs returning to Croatia. The international community is apprised of the need to put pressure on President Tudjman and his Government. A conference will soon be held in Banja Luka to deal with refugee return throughout the region. We demand that the Croatian Government play a constructive part there as well as in Croatia.

Ambassadors

8. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): If he will issue guidance to ambassadors to promote the creative talent of Britain. [36538]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): Our ambassadors already promote Britain's creative talent as part of their general role in export promotion and public diplomacy, but we have nevertheless been examining closely what more we can do. Bodies such as Panel 2000, the creative industries task force, and the creative industries export promotion advisory group bring together the public and private sectors to work out a strategy for developing the export potential of the creative industries. Our missions abroad will have an integral part to play in implementing that strategy.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he assure the House that the effective change that the Government made will be communicated to all our ambassadors overseas?

Mr. Fatchett: Our ambassadors are keen to play a full part. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet our ambassador in Lisbon, who is responsible for the Expo there later this year. The whole House will be delighted by the preparations made for the British involvement in that Expo, and a great deal of credit must go to our ambassador and his team.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Will the Minister ensure that he commends the activities of the British Council, the traditional role of which has been to ensure that both contemporary and traditional Britain is better valued and respected around the world, not only through its English language and educational scholarships, but through the promotion of creativity, culture and British values?

Mr. Fatchett: I am delighted to join the right hon. Lady in singing the praises of the British Council. I have always been impressed by its work, which I have seen in many parts of the world. I hope that it can build on the secure foundations that this Government are offering it, unlike the previous Government, whose cuts in the British Council budget made it difficult for it to plan ahead.

Exports

9. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): What steps he is taking to promote British exports. [36539]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): We, and the Department of Trade and Industry, are implementing the recommendations of the export forum. This includes a new internet-based sales leads service; the export explorer scheme for new and inexperienced exporters wanting to do business in western Europe; the largest ever programme of trade fairs and missions for 1998–99; and the new support for exhibitions and seminars abroad initiative.

In addition, we have introduced a new scheme of short-term attachments of business people to our overseas posts, and 37 senior business leaders have agreed to act as ambassadors for British business.

Mrs. Williams: I congratulate the Minister on the measures that have been taken. We all understand the difficult export conditions that we face at the moment.

Can he announce today what plans he has to build on the successful work of his private sector advisers, and say whether he intends to recruit more?

Mr. Fatchett: We are very much enjoying our relationship with the private sector through the business ambassador scheme. It is in its early days, but all the signs are that it will be a great success. Indeed, those from the private sector who have been involved in the scheme see the value of it and wish to continue to participate actively and effectively in future.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Is it not pretty pointless trying to encourage exports when the British export industry is being crucified by the value of sterling? Much of British industry and agriculture is already on the verge of recession. Is not it time that the Government said loudly and clearly that it is not in the interests of those who will be in the single currency, or those who will be outside it, that the entry criteria should be fudged in the way intended?

Mr. Fatchett: It has not taken the Conservative party long in opposition to start to run down the efforts of British exporters. It is about time that Conservative Members recognised the success of British exports and started to work out their own policy. They have to tell the country whether they are in favour of the boom and bust that existed under their stewardship of the economy or whether they do not want the Bank of England to have the independence that it currently enjoys. I want to hear exactly what their policy is.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I remind my hon. Friend that every time he walks to the Chamber from Central Lobby, he does so by stepping on tiles manufactured in Stoke-on-Trent? I draw his attention to the importance of giving support to ceramic industry exports. Can he give any encouragement to visits from business people across north Staffordshire to promote our local exports?

Mr. Fatchett: We recognise the importance of the industry to which my hon. Friend refers, and we will continue to give substantial support. My earlier point about extensive support in terms of trade missions and seminars will be helpful to the industry. I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend will find Opposition Members' comments about the plight of Britain's manufacturing industry rather strange when during their stewardship, millions of jobs were lost in British manufacturing industry. They have to answer for their own record, and it is about time that they did so.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): The truth is that Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers are now competing with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to see who can do maximum damage to British exporting. Can the Minister confirm that the export control organisation in the Department of Trade and Industry has suffered an administrative nightmare since the Government came into office? However commendable the objective of the proposed European code of conduct on arms sales, will not the code as drafted simply hand on a plate to other countries the orders for which this country has refused a licence? Under the draft code, will not we be obliged to tell other countries when we have refused a licence, but be powerless to prevent them from fulfilling the same order?

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman's question tells us a great deal about the Conservative party. The fact is that it has not learnt from the years of the Scott report. All he is saying is that Conservative Members want to get rid of all the restrictions on licensing arms exports. They would sell to anybody at any time, without any moral or foreign policy guidance. The hon. Gentleman's question has told us exactly where the Conservative party stands.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does my hon. Friend agree that we must strike a balance between the needs of British exporters and human rights? In Hong Kong, for instance, although the transition has proceeded reasonably smoothly, human rights issues still exist. The elections that will take place on 24 May will not be held under a system of straightforward universal suffrage. Does my hon. Friend agree that the importance of exports to China should not be allowed to overshadow our on-going moral responsibility to the people of Hong Kong?

Mr. Fatchett: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I have no doubt that she will endorse the Government's policy. It can be demonstrated that, in our relations with China and with Hong Kong, we have been able to promote both a trade agenda and a human rights agenda. My hon. Friend can catch up with what we have done by referring to the list of human rights achievements that I gave in the House last week. We have made a number of substantial achievements in the human rights dialogue with China, and we will continue to do so. One important achievement is that China has agreed to report directly to the United Nations on human rights in Hong Kong.

Israel

10. **Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): If he will make a statement on current relations between the UK and Israel. [36540]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): We enjoy a full range of contacts with Israel. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is looking forward to his visit to Israel later this month as part of a tour of the middle east.

Mr. Pickles: Does the Minister agree that the United Kingdom remains a firm friend of Israel, and that one of the duties of a friend is sometimes to give unpalatable advice? On reflection, does he feel that the conduct of his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—in terms of the mixture, or balance, of those whom he met, and in terms of the choice of location and the language used—precluded Britain from taking such a position of influence, because it was undiplomatic? What advice will the Minister offer the Prime Minister to repair the damage that the Foreign Secretary did to Israeli-British relations?

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit was a success, and I have every confidence that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit to Israel will be a similar success.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Through my hon. Friend, let me congratulate my right hon. Friend the

Foreign Secretary on his recent visit to the middle east. It is clear from the reports from both Israel and Arab countries that the visit was an unqualified success.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the one thing that we need to know about foreign policy in the middle east is that those who have dealings with the parties there must be honest, straightforward and truthful? Is he, like me, saddened by the fact that Opposition Back Benchers seem to have given up on the bilateral agreement that we reached across the Floor of the House, and that they, more than anyone else, are likely to undermine the influence of Britain and the European Union in the middle east, where it is essential?

Mr. Fatchett: I am delighted to say that we are not responsible for the behaviour of Opposition Back Benchers. That task would be too great for even this Government.

My hon. Friend is right. We have in the European Union a clear statement of principles. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary always acted in accordance with those principles: that is why his conduct and his visit to the middle east were endorsed by European Union Foreign Ministers. We have been able to show that Europe can make a significant contribution to the peace process.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Minister recognise the incredulity with which members of my party have observed the Foreign Secretary patting himself on the back for the success of his visit, with typically lickspittle Liberal Democrat support? Does he not recall that his visit was summed up by a leader in *The Times* in two words—"diplomatic disaster"? Does he not realise that members of all parties in the House, whatever they may say publicly, are secretly relieved—given the contribution that the Foreign Secretary made to that peace process—that he is not involved in the current attempted peace process in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Fatchett: I think that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will accept that that question was unworthy even of his own normal standards.

Throughout the lifetime of this Government, we have said that we have a keen commitment to the peace process, and we will continue that commitment. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that the only way in which to make progress in the middle east is to ensure that we push the peace process forward. That is what we want to do. Rather than making cheap, snide comments from the Back Benches—or, indeed, from the Front Bench—we want to get on with the real agenda. We are engaged in that, and will continue to be engaged in it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I have supported the state of Israel since its establishment 50 years ago, and have defended its right to combat aggression and terror like any other state, but is my hon. Friend aware that many of us are deeply disappointed at the actions of the current Israeli Government? Is not it absolutely clear that home truths should be told to the Israelis, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has done, and that there can be no justice in the middle east until the Palestinian people have a state of their own, alongside the Jewish state?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend is right to say that there can be no peace in the middle east until there is justice and security for Israelis and Palestinians, and that is the objective to which my right hon. Friend and the Government are working.

EU Enlargement

11. **Mr. William Cash** (Stone): If he will make a statement on EU enlargement following the European conference in London on 12 March. [36542]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): The European conference successfully held its first meeting in London on 12 March. Last week in Brussels, we launched accession partnerships with the central Europeans and Cyprus, and the European Union has opened accession negotiations with the six countries that are ready to proceed.

We are embarked on the largest expansion in the history of the EU. The enthusiasm of 11 more countries to become members of it demonstrates their view of its success as the basis for prosperity and security. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will endorse their view.

Mr. Cash: Cannot the Foreign Secretary see that the results of the proposed enlargement are reflected in opinion polls, for example, in Poland, which show decreased enthusiasm for deeper integration? That is the direct result of the rumbling of the fact that the new Europe, which new Labour is encouraging in its presidency, is an over-centralised, undemocratic, unaccountable Europe, which is going in exactly the opposite direction to that in which the people of central and eastern Europe really want to go.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure how the hon. Gentleman has spent the past year; the thrust of Government policy is to decentralise rather than to over-centralise, in plain contrast to the policy of the previous Conservative Government. As to lack of democracy, more people have attended open meetings of European Union Councils in Brussels in the first half of the British presidency than ever atended such meetings in the whole of any previous presidency. We have already set a new record for openness.

I warmly welcome the words of the Polish Foreign Minister on returning to Warsaw—that he strongly suppors the new central role that Britain is playing in Europe. If the hon. Gentleman listened to those in government in Poland, he would find that they regard his view of the EU as wholly wrong; they will carry their people with them.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): In Latvia and in Estonia, which is being considered for membership of the European Union, large Russian minorities are denied citizen and human rights. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there should be no question of those countries being permitted to accede to the European Union until the situation there is put to rights?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend touches on what is undoubtedly a big internal issue for Latvia and Estonia. Both countries, especially Estonia, which is in the front rank for accession to the European Union, have made

major progress towards integrating the Russian-speaking minorities, and both, especially Estonia, have matched the proposals of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe to meet its standards and recommendations on the treatment of ethnic minorities. Continued dialogue with the EU and the prospect of membership of it will greatly increase the incentive for both Governments to ensure that they complete that work and fully conform with Europe's standards of treatment of ethnic minorities.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Foreign Secretary give the House an assurance that, on the date that they are expected to join the European Union, the applicant countries will meet the same high standards of animal welfare and environmental protection as are achieved in the existing member states?

Mr. Cook: I can assure the hon. Lady that the applicant countries must meet the full acquis of the European Union. At the point of membership, they must either be fully in conformity with all existing regulations or have tight and well-defined limits on the transition periods to achieving that. Enlargement is important precisely because the environmental standards of some central and eastern European countries are well below those of western Europe. We stand to lose as a result of the pollution and environmental hazards in those countries, so it is in our interests to bring them into the European Union and up to our standards.

Iraq

13. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What assessment he has made of the progress of weapons inspectors in Iraq since the UN Secretary-General's agreement with Saddam Hussein. [36544]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I am satisfied that Iraq has so far adhered to the commitments it gave to the United Nations Secretary-General on 23 February. At present, it is allowing weapons inspections to proceed in line with its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Given the current situation, compared with that of just a few months ago, has not the Government's policy of taking a tough stance with Saddam Hussein been completely vindicated? Has not that policy improved peace prospects in that part of the globe?

Mr. Fatchett: I agree with my hon. Friend. The position taken by the Government and supported by the other political parties in the House was the right one to take. When he was in Baghdad, Kofi Annan acknowledged that the threat of force helped in the negotiations. It is in all our interests for the agreement to be adhered to, and we shall continue to monitor the situation closely.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Given what the Minister has just said, will he continue to resist the requests of some Labour Members, which were aired yesterday in Defence questions, to withdraw British forces from the Gulf? Will he instead keep them in place and reinforce them until we can be clear that Saddam Hussein is living up to the spirit and the letter of all agreements with the United Nations?

Mr. Fatchett: I had a meeting last week with Richard Butler of UNSCOM, who told me what was happening on the ground and that UNSCOM was able to carry out its work. It is important that we maintain our vigilance: we must be cautious and must not become over-optimistic about the delivery of the agreement. We want the agreement to be honoured, and it is important that we free Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. It is essential for UNSCOM to get on with its work unfettered.

Nigeria

14. **Mr. Keith Hill** (Streatham): What assessment he has made of progress towards democratic civilian government in Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [36545]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We, along with the European Union, the Commonwealth and other partners, are following closely General Abacha's transition to civil rule. To date, we have concluded that in the absence of freedom of association or speech, and while the draft constitution of 1995 remains unpublished, there has been no real progress towards the restoration of democracy.

Mr. Hill: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does it remain the Government's policy that it will not be acceptable to Britain for General Abacha to transform himself into a civilian president?

Mr. Lloyd: We have always made it clear that the decision about who should be president must rest with the Nigerian people on the basis of a free and transparently fair electoral system. Those requirements have still not been met. We have appealed to the Nigerian Government to ensure that those conditions are put in place, but we are still waiting for real progress in that direction.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): While everyone is attempting to bring civilian rule back to Nigeria, is it helpful to deport Nigerians from this country back to a country where, as we have just been told, civilian democracy does not exist?

Mr. Lloyd: The question of refugees is a matter for the Home Office. Conditions in Nigeria have led to the detention of journalists, the erosion of civil rights and the deaths of some people in prison. Unfortunately, those conditions also create a lively traffic in people who use the asylum system to pursue other ends. Sadly, they do so at the expense of the genuine refugees to whom this country would willingly give shelter.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Minister agree that it is important that international human rights organisations and delegations from other human rights groups should have an opportunity to visit Nigeria to assess for themselves prison conditions and the treatment of people there? Will he do what he can to encourage the Nigerian high commission and the Nigerian Government to lay themselves open to the kind of

international humanitarian examination that the regime certainly needs, in terms of looking at prison conditions and the lack of freedom of association, which the Minister rightly mentioned in an earlier answer?

Mr. Lloyd: We know that prison conditions in Nigeria are not good. That is evident from the recent death of Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, who was a soldier of great integrity and whose death was widely mourned by, I think, the overwhelming majority of decent Nigerians. The Nigerian Human Rights Commission has itself criticised conditions in the prisons. My hon. Friend is right to say that it would be in the interests of all Nigerians and, indeed, in the end the Nigerian Government to make the process much more transparent. Sadly, I must record that I do not think that they are prepared to take that direction at the moment.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does the Minister agree that the Nigerian people had their say and elected a president, and that General Abacha is simply a crook who did not want to give up the chance of continuing to line his pockets? Her Majesty's Government should treat him in that way and should not dignify him with the title of President of Nigeria.

Mr. Lloyd: There certainly was an election in 1993 and the international community as well as Nigerians believed that it was probably the fairest election that Nigeria had ever had. It certainly produced in Chief Abiola a person who was widely seen to be the victor. For his heinous crime of winning the election, Chief Abiola has languished in prison almost ever since. It is an outrage that he, together with General Obasanjo and 20 Ogonis, are held as political prisoners. We call on the Nigerians to release those in prison and to lay the foundations for a proper electoral process for the Nigerian people who are sovereign in the destiny of that country.

Iraq

15. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Pursuant to his oral answer of 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1266, if he will assess the advantages of lifting the embargo on the export of pumping equipment to Iraq; and what proposals he has to assist Iraq in improving the quality of water for domestic consumption. [36546]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): Paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution 1153 requests the Secretary-General to establish a group of experts to assess Iraq's ability to export sufficient petroleum or petroleum products to finance the expanded oil-for-food programme. On the basis of the group's recommendations, authorisation may be given for certain equipment to be imported to enable Iraq to increase oil output. Some of the proceeds under the expanded oil-for-food programme, which was set up by resolution 1153, will be available for rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructures.

Mr. Dalyell: In view of the likelihood of the havoc that could be created by waterborne disease among the children of Iraq, is not it a matter of great urgency for pumps to be repaired? What is the perceived danger in the export of pumping equipment?

Mr. Fatchett: I remind my hon. Friend of the answer that I have just given, which is that, under the new procedures of resolution 1153, it is possible to satisfy some of the needs to which he refers. The matter will be controlled and regulated under the Security Council resolution. My hon. Friend may also be keen to know that, as part of its EU presidency, the United Kingdom is organising a conference on humanitarian aid to the people of Iraq. That will take place later this month and will give us the opportunity to bring together organisations from various countries which are working under the auspices of the United Nations. Hopefully, they will address some of the issues to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is highly desirable for the embargoes to be lifted as soon as that is conveniently and suitably possible? Does he also agree that the Annan agreement on the weapons inspectors has meant that, because of the burden of work, the weapons inspectors will take longer than before to do the deal which, the Minister rightly says, needs to be done thoroughly? What steps can he take to assist Richard Butler and his weapons inspectors to speed up their inspections so that the embargoes may safely be lifted?

Mr. Fatchett: I have every confidence in Richard Butler and his team. They are getting on with their work to the best of their ability and at the speed at which they are allowed to proceed by the Iraqi regime. We shall certainly encourage them to move as quickly as possible, but the objective for all of us is to ensure that Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction. That is the responsibility of the UNSCOM inspectors. The simple truth, which the hon. Gentleman recognised in his question, is that had Saddam Hussein complied with Security Council resolutions many years ago, all of these issues would have been resolved, and Iraq would have been free of sanctions and of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): What checks are in place to ensure that invoices relating to equipment imported by the Iraqis under the resolutions reflect the real export value from the countries of origin? Is not there a danger that unless proper checks are in place, over-invoicing of equipment will simply lead to moneys effectively being pooled by Iraqi business men and Ministers abroad?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. If the system is working in the way he fears, we would certainly wish to hear evidence to substantiate his concerns. We are keen to make sure that the sanctions regime is fair and efficient—it should be fair to the ordinary people of Iraq, but should also allow the United Nations to meet its objectives and targets. Certainly, we do not wish to see the system bypassed in the way that my hon. Friend fears or in any other way. Again, if he has any useful information, I would be delighted to see it.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), said that it was the Opposition's policy to scrap all licences for the export of defence equipment. There is no basis for that statement, and the Minister of State knows that there is no basis for that statement. Will you now give him the opportunity to withdraw it?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman must be aware that it is not. It is a question of argument. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wishes to table another question to the Foreign Office Minister, he is at liberty to do so, but it is not a point of order at this stage.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In answer to my question, the Foreign Secretary said that he was not making a statement on his visit to the middle east because the visit did not involve any change of policy. He was seeking to justify not making a statement on the ground—

Hon. Members: Order.

Madam Speaker: Order. I will hear points of order and make up my own mind whether they are valid. Mr. Hogg, I will hear you out.

Mr. Hogg: The Foreign Secretary was seeking to justify not making a statement on the ground that his visit to the middle east did not involve a change of policy. Will you please confirm, Madam Speaker, that, for very many years, Foreign Secretaries, other Foreign Ministers and, indeed, other Ministers have reported to the House on their overseas visits, notwithstanding the fact that those visits did not involve a change of policy? Will you also confirm that the Foreign Secretary's statement involves a change in practice which is very undesirable because it diminishes the accountability of Ministers?

Madam Speaker: I heard the exchange, and I wholly understand the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point of order. It is true that ministerial statements need not be confined to changes of Government policy. There are many occasions when senior Ministers have made a visit abroad, and when the House has had a right to expect a statement on their return.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In spite of the concern expressed in all quarters of the House, and in spite of the representations made in debate and by letter, the BBC is persisting with its plans to change the broadcasting of Parliament. I know that you have written on behalf of the whole House on this issue. Is your correspondence in the Library? If not, would you be good enough to place it there?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On the same point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not obvious that the BBC has shown total contempt for the views that have been expressed in the House and by many people outside, and for the representations that have been made, including, of course, by you? Should we not make it clear to the BBC that we are not simply concerned with the recording of our debates, but that we feel that people who want to listen—and listen on the most convenient channel—should be able to do so and should not be dictated to by the BBC? What sort of freedom would the BBC have if parliamentary democracy did not exist?

Madam Speaker: What is important to me is that the reporting of Parliament is available to as wide a listening audience as possible. On the BBC's own admission, the listening audience for "Yesterday in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster" will be halved once the changes are made. I talked recently to the BBC chairman. The correspondence following that meeting is available to all hon. Members in the Library.

BILL PRESENTED

Licensing (Amendment)

Mr. Paul Truswell presented a Bill to amend section 169 of the Licensing Act 1964 so that any person selling alcohol to persons under the age of 18 on licensed premises commits an offence: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April, and to be printed [Bill 170].

Football Sponsorship Levy

3.35 pm

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a Football Levy Board with powers to impose levies on football organisations and to allocate sums for the benefit of association football.

Parliament needs to take a lead, where others have failed, to tackle the ever-growing financial divide between super-rich clubs and the rest. If action is not taken soon, dozens of smaller clubs may go to the wall, dragging down with them the prosperity and well-being of the local communities that they represent.

I welcome the Government's commitment to supporting our national game through committing £20 million to the Football Trust to improve the stadiums of clubs below the Premiership, and I welcome also the action to tackle racism, but hon. Members on both sides of the House, as evidenced by the 155 hon. Members who have already signed my early-day motion, want to be able to applaud the Government for more. My Bill seeks to offer that opportunity through the establishment of an independent representative board to distribute television money more fairly.

If politics is to re-empower the disempowered, replacing disillusion with faith and commitment, football is as good a place to start as any. My Bill tackles the whole unfair business of football wealth. Football is awash with money. In the past few years, hundreds of millions of pounds have come into the game through lucrative sponsorship deals, stock market flotations, merchandising and, above all, television deals. That television exposure has been the key to unlocking the millions from those other sources, with the lion's share of the money going to Premiership clubs, which set themselves up as an elite group to cream off Sky TV money.

I do not wish to offend hon. Members who support Premiership teams, but the Premiership was founded on greed. As time passes, we see also the greed of people who have a passion for making vast amounts of money, rather than for football. That is a source of aggravation and despair for fans of Premiership clubs, who want football to flourish and to be given back to the fans.

This problem runs the length and breadth of Britain, but, if we consider the example of England and Wales, we can contrast the £200 million a year broadcasting money that is shared between 20 Premiership clubs, with the £20 million a year that is shared between 24 division one clubs, leaving the crumbs of £5 million to be scattered among the 48 divisions two and three clubs: for Lincoln City £104,000; for Spurs £10 million. At a meeting tomorrow, Nationwide first division clubs will seek to grab a bigger slice of the television cake. That cannot go on.

If the already uneven distribution of broadcasting money becomes even more uneven, genuine competition will be stifled throughout the game. Football thrives on competition. It depends on the art of the possible. With the right mix of skill, tactics, stamina, luck and sound finances, a small club can clamber up the football mountain.

The smaller clubs are being clobbered in many ways. The knock-on effect of the rich clubs being made richer by television wealth is the upward spiralling of wages and transfer fees. I hope that hon. Members do not begrudge top-quality players the rich rewards that they deserve, particularly in such a short career, but the upward spiral of wages means that smaller clubs living on the edge have to offer wages that they can ill afford, because if they do not, somebody else will. On top of that, midweek televised football reduces the gates at the smaller clubs while the top clubs benefit.

Why should we be bothered about smaller league clubs—the Lincoln Citys, the Burnleys and the Bournemouths? There will be plenty of others to support, and hours of football on the television to enjoy. The reason why we should be bothered is my motivation in bringing forward the Bill.

Smaller clubs make a unique contribution to the economic and community life of their towns and cities, as I have seen in Lincoln. Around Lincoln City, affectionately known as the Imps, after the mischievous Lincoln imp in the cathedral, is a whole industry which touches our lives beyond the outcome of the match.

However, let us not minimise the impact of winning or losing on a community. At the most recent home game, I felt a dampening of the spirits at the Imps' 1-0 defeat at the feet of Colchester. The hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) will not support that point. Some say that losing a game is like losing an election. It is not; it is worse.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): No, it is not.

Gillian Merron: For some, it is.

Lincoln City football club has spawned three websites, two fanzines—*The Deranged Ferret* and *The Yellow Belly*—an all-weather pitch, social and leisure facilities which we can all use, its own band featuring Ringo the drummer, in case anyone wondered where he went to, and a plethora of sponsorship deals ranging from those with big companies such as European Gas Turbines and the *Lincolnshire Echo*, down to sponsoring the boots of the club's longest-serving player, Grant Brown, which I do.

If you were fortunate enough to come to Lincoln on a match day, Madam Speaker, you could enjoy the nationally acclaimed and now legendary hot pork rolls. There is a whole economy, industry and community based around the local football club, which gives so much back through its community programme, its education programme and its charity work.

As David Kilpatrick, chairman of Rochdale football club, has said:

"How far do you want to be obsessed with always being the biggest and the best? There is a place for doing what you do at your level to the best of your ability, and I don't see anything wrong in that."

Let us not forget the career opportunities and the hopes and dreams offered every year by the smaller clubs to hundreds of talented youngsters. The super-rich teams cannot fill their sides with overseas talent for ever.

There will always be people who want to support a successful and famous team, but what is support? Is it buying the latest replica kit and the glossy club magazine, seeing the team on television, but rarely, if ever, watching it because it is too expensive; or is it watching the local team through thick and thin and feeling part of that club? The passion felt by supporters of smaller clubs is more

[Gillian Merron]

heartfelt, not less. A spectator is just as likely to see an enthralling encounter in the third division as in the Premiership.

For football to remain vibrant and solid in the local economy and community, there must be strength outside the Premiership. Mr. John Reames, chairman of my local football club, warns bluntly and correctly that the future of football as we know it is at stake right now. I ask hon. Members to support the Bill to serve the millions of people in hundreds of constituencies throughout the land for whom football, our national game, and all that goes with it, is key to their communities and lives.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Gillian Merron, Mr. John Heppell, Mr. Vernon Coaker, Liz Blackman, Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, Mrs. Joan Humble, Mrs. Linda Gilroy, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mrs. Teresa Gorman and Mr. Lembit Öpik.

FOOTBALL SPONSORSHIP LEVY

Gillian Merron accordingly presented a Bill to establish a Football Levy Board with powers to impose levies on football organisations and to allocate sums for the benefit of association football: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 171].

Orders of the Day

National Lottery Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

3.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am very pleased to open this debate on the National Lottery Bill. It is a Bill of which I am extremely proud, both for what it contains and for what it symbolises. It contains an agenda for radical reform of the way in which the lottery is regulated and the way in which lottery money is distributed. It is a very tangible example of the Government's commitment to reform and to keeping their election promises. The themes that underpin the Bill—excellence, access, education and the recognition of the value of creative and cultural activity to the country's economic and social well-being—are also the themes that run through all my Department's policies. So the Bill sets the stage for use of the lottery to assist more people in more ways and with greater fairness. I am astonished that Conservative Members cannot see the value in that.

I have two very simple aims in seeking to reform the lottery: first, to ensure that people have confidence in the way in which the lottery is run and regulated, and, secondly, to ensure that people have confidence that the money that it raises goes where it is needed and to meet their priorities.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: So soon? Of course.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many of us on the Conservative Benches have reservations about what he is doing, because he is setting out to undermine the additionality principle on which so many of his hon. Friends, particularly the Minister for Sport, insisted when the lottery was set up?

Mr. Smith: I should have run a sweepstake on when that question would first arise in the debate because, of course, it is the common and rather tired theme of Conservative Members. I shall quote to the hon. Gentleman a passage in the reply given to the Select Committee on National Heritage, as it then was, in July 1996 by the then Secretary of State for National Heritage, the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). She said very clearly—this is the precise definition of additionality:

> "Lottery funds are not intended to substitute for funds which would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure".

We stand firmly by that principle; there is nothing in the Bill that undermines it.

The Bill goes a long way to creating a lottery that achieves the aims of greater confidence that I have set out. As I shall point out, there is much else that we are doing besides legislation to bring about our vision of a people's lottery. I should like to deal first with the operation and regulation of the lottery.

The national lottery has generated nearly £5 billion for the good causes since its launch in 1994, and we confidently predict that that will rise to £10 billion by the end of Camelot's licence in September 2001.

I pay a word of tribute to the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), whom I am pleased to see in his place, for having had the courage to come forward with the proposal for the lottery in the first place. The lottery has become part of national life, and it is vital that it be an enterprise that we can be proud of, not one that provides a constant stream of headlines for the wrong reasons.

There has, I fear, been a shadow hanging over the lottery since the libel trial involving Branson and Snowden earlier this year. I am determined that that shadow shall be lifted. We have long been concerned about whether the arrangements set in place by the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 were the best guarantee of effective regulation, and whether they provided the objectivity, independence and transparency that the public rightly demand.

The Bill, as introduced in another place, recognised the importance of widening the experience and expertise brought to bear on the selection of the lottery operator. It therefore made provision for an advisory panel to help the director general with that task.

Re-examining the matter, however, and in the light of recent events, I have concluded that there is more that we can do to ensure that the public can have confidence in the independence and objectivity of the regulator. In particular, I have concluded that a move away from a focus on a particular individual will help to remove any possible criticism to the effect that conflicts of interest, actual or perceived, threaten effective regulation.

I therefore intend, as I announced in reply to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) last week, to introduce amendments to the Bill to replace the post of director general with a new National Lottery Commission. The commission, which will consist of five members, will take on the same statutory functions and duties as the director general now has. Its role will be to ensure that the lottery is run and promoted with all due propriety, and that the interests of all players are protected—and, subject to those duties, to do its best to secure the best possible return for the good causes.

In appointing commissioners, I shall look for people with a mixture of relevant expertise, knowledge and experience—of the lottery market, of business and industry, of consumer representation and of the interests of players. Above all, I shall look for people of the highest integrity. They will be responsible for awarding all licences, for ensuring compliance with the conditions of those licences, and for maintaining the nation's confidence in the institution of the lottery.

I shall ensure that the commissioners are appointed following an open and transparent selection process. The commission will be the people's watchdog, the guardian of the people's money.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I am sure that the commission that my right hon. Friend has in mind will remove some of the danger of conflicts of interest. However, as I am sure he is aware, questions are now being asked about the National Audit Office's rights of access, not to Camelot but to documentation and records held by the regulator, who is a public servant. That is a new issue. I shall not go into detail at this stage, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that the matter is clarified before the Committee stage, so that we are sure that the National Audit Office, the watchdog for Parliament, has full and appropriate access to the regulator's records?

Mr. Smith: Yes. We intend to address that matter in detail in Committee. The precise provisions have, of course, to be agreed by the National Audit Office and to be properly put together—but we shall introduce amendments to secure the sort of access that my right hon. Friend and the Public Accounts Committee have in mind.

The commission will be supported in its work by the existing Oflot staff, and the amendments will provide for their employment by the commission on the same terms and conditions as govern their current employment.

None of what I propose should be taken as any criticism of the acting director general or his staff, whose professionalism and commitment are not in question. Through all the recent events, John Stoker has acted effectively and professionally. I had every confidence in him when he took over in February, and that confidence was not misplaced. He has taken a properly robust approach.

I am glad that Camelot has sensed the mood of the country and decided to remove GTech as a shareholder and board member. The new commission will have in its armoury the power already contained in the Bill to fine licence holders. That fills a gap that was highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee, and any fines levied will go to the good causes, not the Treasury.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Secretary of State said that he expects £10 billion to be raised over the course of Camelot's licence. Given what he said about GTech, does he think that that £10 billion will still be raised if the acting director general decides that GTech is no longer fit to be a supplier of equipment to Camelot?

Mr. Smith: The acting director general is currently considering that matter, and we expect his judgment very shortly. Until then, it would not be sensible to consider such hypothetical matters.

Before Opposition Members do so, let me draw attention to something that is not in the Bill. Look as hard as one will, one will not find any mention of a not-for-profit operator; nor will one find any mention of a for-profit operator. We said in our manifesto that we would seek a not-for-profit operator for the next licence, and we remain committed to that objective.

There is no need to change the existing legislation to bring that about. We can achieve our aim entirely within the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. Let me stress that, in seeking a not-for-profit operator and assessing any other proposals, the National Lottery Commission will have one overriding aim: to ensure that the lottery delivers the best possible return for the good causes. I remain committed to our manifesto pledge, and that will be clear when we advertise the next operator's licence.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I welcome the proposal for a commission of several people to regulate the lottery, but is the Secretary of State willing to consider separating the

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

function of selection of the operator from the function of regulation? In a written answer, he said that he was aware of the risk of regulatory capture, and it is desirable that the regulator should be seen to be at arm's length.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise that point, and we considered carefully whether we should have one body, person or system for selecting the operator and another for monitoring the continuing operation of the lottery, but there are two problems with such a solution.

First, during the lifetime of a licence there will be other licences, particularly section 6 licences, to be determined, and the question would arise whether the original body or the continuing body should make those decisions.

Secondly, the information that a regulator gathers during the decision-making process on the selection of the operator is invaluable in protecting the interests of the public and informing the regulatory process through the course of the licence.

Because we were concerned about regulatory capture, we decided to adopt the proposal of a commission rather than a single regulator. It is much more difficult to secure such capture when one has a commission rather than a single person to deal with. Though the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) has a valid point, we have considered carefully the arguments for and against proceeding down that road. We think that our solution is the best in the circumstances.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill establishes a sixth good cause and a new lottery distributor, the New Opportunities Fund. The new good cause will direct lottery money into projects related to health, education and, in due course, the environment. The first three initiatives supported by the new good cause were announced before the general election and massively endorsed by those responding to our White Paper last July. Only yesterday, I was at a meeting of voluntary organisations in Telford and received overwhelming support for our precise proposals.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman wants to do a jack-in-the-box act, I am happy to let him in again.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. Before he moves too far from the issue of a not-for-profit operation, will he acknowledge that, when the lottery operating bids were considered, it was clear that the not-for-profit bid would not have raised as much money for good causes as the bid that was selected? Is not the most important thing how much money goes to good causes, and not his party's dogmatic opposition to the concept of profit?

Mr. Smith: Just two minutes ago—I can quote it exactly—I said:

"Let me stress that, in seeking a not-for-profit operator and assessing any other proposals, the National Lottery Commission will have one overriding aim: to ensure that the lottery delivers the best possible return for the good causes."

I cannot answer for the hon. Gentleman's hearing, but his intelligence seems to be lacking.

We have already made much progress in setting out the detail of the initiatives under the New Opportunities Fund that we want to undertake: £300 million will be available between now and 2001 to train teachers and librarians in the new information and communications technology so vital to our children's futures in the next millennium; £50 million of that will help to digitise learning materials for use in schools and libraries, to be available free through the national grid for learning and the public libraries network. There will be £400 million over the next five years for out-of-school activities, including child care. That will ensure new and exciting out-of-school opportunities in at least half our secondary schools and a quarter of primary schools. They might provide maths, language or homework clubs, or the chance to take up new sports, get involved with local drama groups or learn about the local environment.

There will be £300 million to establish a network of healthy living centres to provide practical help and advice on health, diet and fitness, on the high street or the local estate, accessible to at least 20 per cent. of the population. Only a few weeks ago, I visited a healthy living centre in Meadow Well on North Tyneside which is already helping to transform the confidence of which hard-pressed community, and the health and life expectations of many of its people. These initiatives command widespread public support, and will do much to help the lives of real people.

That is an ambitious programme for the New Opportunities Fund. To help it get off to a flying start we have established a shadow fund. The interim chief executive took up his post last week, and other key staff have been identified. We have also advertised for the chair and members of the fund. The response has been overwhelming: more than 300 expressions of interest, the vast majority from well-qualified, experienced people eager to be part of this new and exciting enterprise. One or two of the expressions of interest have come from former Tory Members of Parliament—so perhaps the well-qualified epithet needs to be revised in a few cases.

Unfortunately, I fear that the surviving Conservative Members have signally failed to share in the popular enthusiasm for the new good cause. They take every opportunity to tell the world that they do not like it. I am sure that we will hear the same old arguments from the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). He will say that we have ditched the additionality principle—indeed, we have already heard that—implying, strangely, that anything proposed in health or education must be funded by the taxpayer, while arts, sport, charities and the heritage have never ever been Government responsibilities. What nonsense.

The principle is clear. Lottery money must not replace Exchequer spending—it must add new value. We stand firm by that principle. Let us consider what the Conservatives would have done had they, by any remote

chance, been re-elected on 1 May last year. On BBC's "Sport on Four" on 7 March this year, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon said:

"Had we won the last election, one of the things I wished to do, once the Lottery was established, was to see whether the resourcing was there to actually put sports teachers back into schools."

Never mind the split infinitive; the Tories clearly were planning to use the lottery to pay for teachers' salaries—and they have the gall to criticise us for breaching the additionality principle.

I also anticipate that the right hon. Member for Horsham will continue his party's pointless nitpicking about the shadow accounts that we and lottery distributors have set up, in line with the changed percentages proposed by the Bill. These arrangements are simple to understand, and just plain common sense.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Does the Secretary of State understand that the additionality principle becomes impossible to determine in circumstances where both the Exchèquer and the lottery are funding an activity? The Secretary of State talks about information technology training for existing teachers, but he must be aware that about £300 million is spent on training for existing teachers, 5 per cent. of which goes on information technology. How are the public to determine what is existing funding and what is additional lottery funding?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman clearly is unaware of the fact that the Arts Council receives £190 million from the Exchequer each year and, in addition, receives about £250 million each year from the lottery. Yes, of course, there are organisations that receive money from the Exchequer and some additional money from the lottery, and there is no difficulty in determining which money comes from which stream.

If the Bill is passed—as I hope and expect it will be—each of the good causes will be guaranteed at least £1.8 billion from the lottery over the lifetime of Camelot's licence; exactly what they originally expected. The extra £1 billion that we now forecast will be allocated to the new good cause and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. In the interests of good planning, the distributors therefore agreed to run shadow accounts which show what money will be available to them if the Bill is passed. If the Bill is not passed, the shadow accounts will be ripped up.

Money is flowing in accordance with the law as it stands, and will then flow in accordance with the changed legislation. There is no problem. However, for the Tories, there is a problem. They say that we are somehow acting unlawfully, and that the retrospective nature of the provision is entirely reprehensible. That is rich of Conservative Members. Several times in the past 18 years, the previous Government adopted an identical approach.

Perhaps the clearest example relates to the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Act 1992. The Minister proposing that Bill told the House:

"It is not retrospective in a substantive sense in that it does not have an effect on matters which took place before the announcement was made; so everyone who has made a transaction since we made the announcement has done so in the full knowledge of what we propose and what the consequences of his actions will be."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 1074.]

The Minister who piloted that Bill through the House, and who said that to the House, was none other than the present right hon. Member for Horsham.

On 1 October 1997, I announced our intentions. Shadow accounts were put in place from 14 October 1997. All the key players were aware of what we were doing. Parliament was informed. The distributors agreed. Lottery players knew where there their money would be going.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: The Opposition stance on this is disingenuous, to say the least, and will continue to be so when the right hon. Gentleman intervenes.

Mr. Maude: I anticipated that the Secretary of State would raise that issue, and I can imagine the thrill of delight, in the team meeting that he must have held at the Department, on the discovery of that fascinating precedent, which he must have thought proved his case. Sadly, it does not, because it is an utterly different case.

On that occasion, I was talking about a retrospective measure which decided not to take from people tax that would otherwise have been taken. The Inland Revenue has always had a power, by way of extra-statutory concession, to do that. There is nothing revolutionary about that, and what I said at the time was correct.

However, it is unprecedented for the Secretary of State to take a decision without parliamentary sanction—without legal backing—to take money from existing good causes to give to a good cause that has not even been set up. It is not even a question of waiting for the ink to dry; the thing was not even written.

Mr. Smith: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman is wrong—and he has not been listening. We are putting in place a shadow accounting procedure, which will be activated only with the authority of Parliament—if the Bill is passed and receives Royal Assent. No money will be spent, and, if the Bill is not passed, nothing will change.

Mr. Maude: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Smith: I add, before I give way again, that the arrangement received the approval and acceptance of all existing distributors.

Mr. Maude: The Secretary of State is being slightly disingenuous; he is saying that this is a paper transaction. We are discussing real money, which would otherwise be available to the existing distributors to distribute, and which, because of his executive action without legal backing, will not now be available to them. There is nothing shadowy or technical about this; this is real money.

Mr. Smith: This will be real money when the Bill becomes law. At present, it is simply an accounting procedure in preparation for the event of the Bill's becoming law. I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman—who, supposedly, has a financial background—cannot understand the simple process that is in operation.

[Mr. Smith]

I shall now say what we are doing to improve the way in which lottery money is used to benefit good causes at the moment. The third section of the Bill—clauses 8 to 12—requires all lottery distributors to produce strategic plans showing how they intend to address the needs of their sectors. It also gives them new powers to solicit applications; to delegate decision making; to support projects in more flexible ways, such as by providing vouchers instead of grants; and to work together on joint schemes.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Those clauses are very important. Is the Secretary of State aware that, in constituencies such as mine, we have not had enough resources to make bids in the first place, and that we want help to ensure that lottery money is directed to where it is most needed?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our proposals are designed to ensure that lottery money not only gets distributed more fairly around the country but goes to meet real needs on the ground.

Taken together, our proposals mean that we are asking and helping distributors to be more strategic and proactive in their use of lottery money. We are streamlining the applications system and helping to cut through the bureaucracy to make it easy for small community groups to find out about the lottery and receive grants.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): This is an extremely important point. Although the lottery officials in my constituency are extremely helpful in providing advice, at the end of the day, the organisations must find substantial sums of money to work up their individual schemes. Sometimes, the technical demands are such that organisations must raise the money before they are included in the selection process. As I understand it, those moneys are attached to the grant that is finally awarded, but, as my right hon. Friend said earlier, many small organisations cannot afford that seedcorn. The Rhondda and other valleys in south Wales receive little lottery money because of that problem.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The changes that we propose in the Bill will tackle those problems precisely. It is extremely interesting that, while Opposition Members are concerned—and wrongly concerned—simply about the theology of the principle of additionality, Labour Members are worried about real people in real communities up and down the country.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): When my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and I took the original legislation through the House, we acted on the best evidence provided by our officials. Our decisions were based not on some dogmatic dislike of what the Secretary of State is now proposing, but on strong evidence from lotteries around the world as collated by our officials. That led us to conclude that breaching the principle of additionality would reduce the revenue from and attractiveness of the lottery. That was our principle and that is why we always entrenched additionality. What has changed?

Mr. Smith: For a start, we are not breaching the principle of additionality. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends brought forward the original legislation acting on the best advice available and on the best assumptions made at the time. However, I am afraid that they did not get it completely right. We are trying to correct some of the problems that have arisen since then.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It must not become part of House of Commons folklore that, somehow or other, the Tory Government ensured that everyone got a fair crack of the whip on a regional basis. The truth is that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) checked the figures in the Library not long before the general election when the Tories were running the show. He found that the three constituencies of North-East Derbyshire, Bolsover and Chesterfield—which were represented by three left-wing Members of Parliament—were in the bottom 10 per cent. of recipients of grants handed out in Britain. On the other hand, Westminster received grants left, right and centre. The Tory party handed over the money—£12 million—for the Churchill papers. I am looking to my right hon. Friend to change that bias and award some grants to constituencies represented by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is not quite right: the Churchill papers were bought with a grant of £13 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Since 1995, some 15,000 people have viewed the Churchill papers—which amounts to a cost of £840 per visitor from the fund.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I must make progress.

We want to ensure that decision making on lottery funds is pushed down nearer to the grassroots. All that has been welcomed by the distributors, but another element, which is not in the Bill, is equally important if we are to ensure that people have confidence that lottery money is going where it counts.

Under the 1993 Act, I can direct distributors on various matters that they must take into account in distributing lottery money. The policy directions that were introduced by the previous Government set a framework that is no longer appropriate. They restrict much of lottery funding to capital projects; they fail to tackle the social and geographical inequities in the system of distribution, which are apparent to us all; and they place too great an emphasis on the need for partnership funding.

I am, therefore, pleased to announce that I have written today to the Arts and Sports Councils, the National Lottery Charities Board and the Heritage Lottery Fund, to open formal consultation on a new package of policy directions that will reflect new priorities. I am publishing those letters and the draft directions today—copies will be available in the Libraries of both Houses. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland will be writing in parallel to their arts and sports distributors with draft directions.

The new directions establish a completely different framework for lottery funding. They shift the focus from the capital revenue debate and concentrate instead on ensuring that lottery money addresses the real needs of communities and that projects will make a real difference

over a specific period. They encourage the distributors to lend support to people and to activities, not only to bricks and mortar. They highlight the importance of promoting access to the arts, sport and heritage for people from all sections of society, wherever they live. They acknowledge, in particular, the need to focus on children and young people. They are intended to ensure a fairer geographical spread across the country.

The directions remove the requirement for significant levels of partnership funding in every case, emphasising instead the importance of assessing each application on its merits and on the scope for in-kind contributions—for example, by involving volunteers. The directions will, for the first time, require distributors to consider how their strategies will contribute to sustainable development, and encourage them to look at what contribution they can make, through the good causes, to reducing economic and social deprivation. I am confident that the distributors will respond positively to those opportunities.

The new framework, which I hope will be in place before the end of May, will open up the lottery for the benefit of everyone. That will mean more projects focusing on people, rather than on buildings, such as the Sports Council's support for amateur coaches or the Heritage Lottery Fund's £7 million for museums access, which is complemented by the Government-funded £2 million challenge fund to secure free admission to our great non-charging national collections.

Part II of the Bill creates NESTA—the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. The creativity of the British people is second to none, but we do not encourage, develop or exploit it as well as we should. Too often, the talented are unable to win through, or have to go abroad to do so. NESTA will help to put that right. Following debate on the Bill in another place, we have tightened up NESTA's remit. Its aims are simple: to support and promote talent, innovation and creativity in science, technology and the arts.

To do that, NESTA will be able to help talented individuals or groups of individuals to realise their potential and to turn good ideas into good businesses. It will also help to make everyone aware of the essential roles that science, technology and the arts play in our lives, and it will, I hope, help to break down those artificial barriers that have existed for too long between the arts and sciences. Those were false barriers in C.P. Snow's time, and in a multi-media world they are now even more irrelevant.

We are giving NESTA a kick start with an initial endowment of £200 million from the lottery, which will immediately place it among the top 10 grant-giving endowments in the UK. NESTA will also raise funds from elsewhere and share the profits earned by individuals and projects that it has supported. The Bill allows it various tax exemptions—hard won from the Treasury—in recognition of its unique funding structure and its similarity in purpose to a charity. As with the New Opportunities Fund, we have already advertised for a chairman and members, and received an overwhelming response. Although I have often said that NESTA is a project for the 21st century, its foundation is being firmly laid in the 20th.

Our vision for the lottery's future shows a clear difference in our politics from those of the Conservative party. It also shows how we are meeting change. The Conservatives presided over a back-to-front lottery distribution process, which too often favoured big projects proposed by well-connected people with highly paid consultants. They did nothing to end the imbalance of lottery funding across the country. They were and are thoroughly hypocritical about additionality, especially given that most people in this country want their lottery money spent on projects related to health and education. Moreover, they are being insincere about their support for arts, sport and heritage, given that the Tories cut arts spending by £14 million in real terms over the past three years.

By allocating an additional £5 million to the performing arts two weeks ago, I have been proud to be able to increase the arts budget for the first time in years. Today, I set out our programme for reforming the lottery to ensure that it benefits every community in the UK. Our framework will inspire confidence in the way the lottery is run and regulated, and in how the money is used. I am sure that Opposition Members will do their best to rubbish the Bill, because it is full of good ideas they wish they had thought of, and because they cannot accept that there is any room for improvement in the flawed model that they launched in 1994. There is, and I have shown exactly how we intend to go about improving it.

Our proposals have already won wide support throughout the country. The Bill passed virtually unchanged through another place, and I hope that it can pass quickly onto the statute book so that we can get on with the job. I commend it to the House.

4.27 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): May I join the Secretary of State in the generous tribute that he paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)? It is good to see my right hon. Friend here, together with my right hon. Friends the Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). Against the background of much criticism, knocking and denigration, they did a huge amount to make the national lottery such an extraordinary success. It is ironic that their success enables this Government, with the Secretary of State as the hapless tool of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to treat the lottery as their re-election fund.

Contrary to what the Secretary of State says, no one claims that everything about the lottery as originally set up was perfect. It would be astonishing if it were. Obviously there is scope for change and improvement. It is hundreds of years since the last national lottery in this country, and it would be extraordinary if we had got everything right the first time.

Some of the changes in the Bill are welcome. We support some clarification of the regulator's powers, and we shall look carefully at the Secretary of State's plans for the new commission. There are clear arguments in the later part of the Bill for allowing the distributors to delegate grant making in some circumstances.

However, most of what the Bill proposes is wrong, because it attacks the very basis on which the lottery was founded and which made it so successful. It puts at risk the success of the most successful national lottery in the world, and we shall oppose it.

Please, let the Secretary of State spare us this insulting rubbish about it being the people's lottery supported by popular acclaim. Let us be quite clear: it is the

[Mr. Francis Maude]

Government's lottery—by the Government, of the Government and for the Government. If his new commission is, as he so portentously claims, to be the people's watchdog, it is lamentable that he has now become the Chancellor's lapdog. It is the Chancellor's lottery.

I shall speak briefly about the part that the Secretary of State rightly prefigured—a matter of some interest, the dog that did not bark, the most startling omission. Labour's manifesto contained a commitment to

"seek a not-for-profit operator".

In July 1996, Labour had said that the lottery

"should be run efficiently but not for profit."

There was no "seeking". It was a clear, hard-edged commitment. It was not at all equivocal. It was an uncharacteristically clear commitment, and, poor sap, the Secretary of State, thought so, because he doggedly went ahead and prepared the Bill on the basis that it was to enact such a provision. The real powers in the Government had not told him that they did not mean it. It was just for the birds. It was only a manifesto pledge. It was just a vehicle for—

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it a parliamentary epithet that the House would regard as acceptable to describe an hon. Member as a poor sap?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): It is not unparliamentary, but I suspect that it is not language that the House would expect.

Mr. Maude: If it is at all unparliamentary, I immediately withdraw it. It was not meant to be a phrase to denote insult; it was one of sympathy for the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State went ahead with the desire to enact the commitment, regarding it—as most people would have done—as clear. He had not been told that it was only a vehicle to extract every last ounce of cheap politics from the jibe about Camelot fat cat salaries. The Government did not mean for the commitment to be implemented. It was just their little joke.

The Secretary of State had to be put right by those worldly folk at Downing street, in a letter that appeared in *The Sunday Telegraph* last July. It was quite a polite letter, so it probably was not written by Alastair Campbell. It made it clear that the Downing street priority—I agree with them—was to maintain the proceeds for the good causes, and any nonsense about eradicating profit was to be very much second place to that. I think that the phrase was that the new system must retain "proper incentives" for the operator to be efficient and to raise much money for good causes. When pressed, it was quite clear that what they meant were financial incentives. So we have an interesting situation: profit is definitely out, but financial incentives are in.

The outcome of that interesting dance was a fudge so exquisite in its contradictions that it deserves to stand as a monument to new Labour's approach to government. The White Paper, when it eventually emerged, restated the manifesto pledge. It was perfectly clear, but in inverted commas, as though it was not really to be taken too seriously—as though it were a slightly decomposing relic from the past.

The text was far different. In place of "not for profit"—the phrase that Labour had used previously—there was now a commitment to

"removing unnecessary profit margins".

We have waited with bated breath for the Secretary of State to disclose how he plans to accomplish this astonishing goal. We have waited and waited. There is nothing in the Bill, so we assumed that there would be Government amendments, but there have been none so far. Now he tells us that there is to be nothing. The Bill will remain silent on it.

So what is the answer? They have discovered something remarkable, that there is a way to remove unnecessary profit margins: invite potential operators to put in competing bids, and select the one that offers the best proposal for the good causes, with least profit to itself. It is called a tender process. It is a process which the Act already provides.

We now wait—without much hope—for the Secretary of State to say that he is sorry; that, on reflection, the current system is fine, and he was wrong to say that the Government had changed it. What happened to the humility that was to be the hallmark of new Labour in government? Or was that just for the birds, too?

Mr. Lansley: My right hon. Friend has referred to the existing system. The Public Accounts Committee examined the way in which the director general applied that system, and, in its report of July 1996, made clear the director general's view that applicants' intentions regarding the use of profit—and, indeed, whether a profit was made, and whether it was handed to charity—were not relevant considerations under the Act.

Mr. Maude: It appears that there is now no agreement. I do not know why Labour had to make such a fuss about the profit element before the election, given that it has now utterly resiled from its former position. What we want is a system and an operator that will maximise the proceeds for good causes: that is what the lottery is for, for heaven's sake, and that is what the Act provides for. It is not a particularly revolutionary process. It is in the Act already, and the Secretary of State should now apologise for having run that canard so vigorously for so long.

The Secretary of State spoke at length about additionality. I appreciate that additionality is not a subject of discussion in pubs and clubs up and down the land, but people know what is straightforward and what is not, and the introduction of the lottery was always going to be controversial. As well as concern about the endorsement of gambling, there was bound to be anxiety about how the proceeds would be used. It was possible, however, to win widespread support for the lottery, and essential to that support were its two founding principles.

No one was more enthusiastic about those principles than the Labour party in opposition. Labour Members supported the lottery; indeed, they pressed us further, tabling amendments to entrench the system and make it more difficult for Ministers to abuse lottery money.

The principles were clear. First, lottery proceeds should not be used to fund projects that were mainstream Government responsibilities: that is the additionality

principle. Secondly, the recipient projects should be chosen not by Ministers, but by distributing bodies operating independently of Ministers. That is the arm's-length principle. It is richly ironic that those twin principles, so passionately espoused by Labour in opposition, should now be so cynically betrayed by Labour in government.

No one contends that we could never contemplate the addition of further good causes to those already established; that would be absurd. But Labour warned us when in opposition that it was the ambition of every Finance Minister throughout the world to deploy lottery proceeds on mainstream Government policies.

What is so obnoxious about the Bill is the combination of theft and deceit. If the Government have got themselves into a tangle through policy commitments that they cannot fund in the usual way, let them be brave enough, and honest enough, to say so. Let them admit that they over-promised, and that they need to make up the shortfall from elsewhere.

Mr. Chris Smith: The right hon. Gentleman's remarks are rather ungracious. First, the only items that we propose to fund through the Bill are those that we committed ourselves to funding with lottery money at the time of the election. Secondly, we entirely agree with what the Conservative party spokesman in the House of Lords, Lady Trumpington, said in November 1996, when she spoke approvingly of

"the use of lottery funds to secure projects or programmes beyond the scope of foreseeable affordability but similar to those hitherto financed by public expenditure."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, November 1996; Vol. 575, c. 567.]

Does that not drive a coach and horses through the right hon. Gentleman's argument?

Mr. Maude: The Secretary of State is now employing a wriggling, slippery, lawyer's argument to extend the definition of additionality far enough to encompass everything that he wants to do. The Prime Minister's words in the White Paper are in inverted commas, so the Secretary of State may want to distance himself from them. He said:

"We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities".

That is perfectly clear—no ifs, no buts, no maybes and no provisos—but it is ignored in the Bill.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: I should like to make progress.

Many of the headlines in the White Paper say one thing, but the fine print says another, which is the technique used by the dodgier timeshare salesman. How can anyone seriously argue that policy initiatives to be funded by the New Opportunities Fund are not Government responsibilities—in their own terms?

Far from arguing that plans for out-of-school-hours clubs are not a Government responsibility, Ministers are desperate to take the credit and to boast about them. The Chancellor, announcing the scheme in his pre-Budget statement, said:

"A national child care strategy is no longer the ambition of workless parents; it is now the policy of this country's Government".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 777.]

Why have the Government taken credit for the scheme if it is not their responsibility, and why are they paying for it with taxpayers' money?

Ministers have made it clear that the Government provide money through training and enterprise councils to fund their out-of-school child care initiative, and that the scheme announced by the Chancellor would be an extension of it—financed with lottery money. Why are the Government spending taxpayers' money if it is not their responsibility? By the Prime Minister's own criterion, lottery money should not be used if it is a Government responsibility.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Labour Members said one thing in opposition and are doing another in government, a practice with which we have become all too familiar? Will he confirm that out-of-hours school clubs are not new? The Secretary of State repeatedly says that they are, and did so again on the "Today" programme this morning, but is he not ignoring the previous Conservative Government's support for the Kids Club Network and after-school clubs, with which I am familiar because I visited some with Conservative Ministers?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend makes a good point. This magpie Government will take credit for anything, and will steal any idea. The sheer intellectual dishonesty with which the proposition has been introduced beggars belief.

Mrs. Mahon: Has the right hon. Gentleman, like me, had playing fields and libraries in his constituency closed down wholesale because local government funding has been cut? How many homework clubs and healthy living centres were funded by the previous Government, and where are they?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Lady makes my point exactly—in her eyes, those are Government responsibilities. To say that they are extras that are nothing to do with the Government and should be paid for by the lottery is rubbish. I know of playing fields that have been closed down; sadly, too many Labour councils were not interested in sport in schools, and sold them off.

Mrs. Mahon: Does that not show that the right hon. Gentleman is not committed to after-hours activities for children?

Mr. Maude: I do not know how the hon. Lady draws that conclusion. My point is about who is responsible; if she does not detect the deep inconsistency and danger in the proposals for those who look to the lottery to fund additional activities, she should look more carefully at the fine print of White Papers and Government announcements.

Information technology training for teachers and for librarians is another so-called extra that is to be funded by the New Opportunities Fund. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) made the point that it is already funded by the taxpayer, but the Secretary of State tried to wriggle out of that when he wrote to me last year. He said:

"The Lottery-funded training will not support the basics of operating the technology, but will focus on helping teachers to use the technology in the classroom".

[Mr. Maude]

That is not true. Only a month later, the Minister for School Standards admitted that the Government spend £50 million on exactly that.

On Second Reading in the other place, the deputy Chief Whip in the House of Lords announced that the scope of the initiatives would be expanded to pay for digitisation of educational and learning materials for schools and libraries. It is to be used not only for paying for training teachers and librarians, but for the materials they use in classrooms and libraries. Exactly as we predicted, every step taken by the Government takes lottery money further into their own responsibilities.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman say whether he assumes that the Government have no responsibility for arts funding, sports funding and heritage funding?

Mr. Maude: I simply go by what the Prime Minister said—he, I assume, sets out policy for the Government. I assume that what the Prime Minister said is the basis on which the Government are operating. He said:

"We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities."

That is not my definition, although it is not a bad one to be going on with. I am surprised that the Secretary of State does not feel able to support the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Cannot the shadow Minister distinguish between a relatively small annual figure that is required for training new teachers in new technology and the relatively large one-off sum that is required to deal with a huge backlog in new technologies training and to get teachers up to speed for the new educational circumstances in which they will work?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying, "Forget the principle; let's argue about the price." I should be interested in his view. Does he think that either amount—the large amount or the small amount—is a Government responsibility? If he accepts that either of them is, according to the Prime Minister's own words, lottery funding is not appropriate.

Mr. Smith: I repeat the question: does the right hon. Gentleman believe that funding of the arts, sport and heritage has no relevance for Government expenditure?

Mr. Maude: Of course I accept that there is a role for Government spending. It is an absurd question; the question that the right hon. Gentleman must answer—

Mr. Smith: I have.

Mr. Maude: The right hon. Gentleman may think that it is game, set and match, but he has not even picked up the racket. I remind him that he is the Secretary of State, and that Labour Members form the Government—they are setting policy, and must answer the questions. The Prime Minister has made a broad and clear statement of policy. Are those activities to be funded by the New Opportunities Fund? Are they Government responsibilities or not?

The White Paper makes it clear that healthy living centres are to be part of the Government's health care provision. It states:

"healthy living centres will play an important role in the Government's public health strategy".

It is funny that they should be paid for from the lottery if they are not a Government responsibility.

It is insulting for Ministers to continue to go through the absurd charade of pretending that the basic principles of the lottery are being maintained. Put simply, no one believes it, because it is demonstrably untrue.

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: I should like to give way, but many hon. Members wish to speak.

Peter Riddell, never new Labour's strongest critic, is not the only one to spot what is going on. In *The Times* yesterday, he wrote:

"But a Treasury raid it still is, to evade tight limits on public spending and to find new sources of revenue without having to raise taxes."

That puts it pretty clearly. In reality, Ministers are condemned time after time out of their own mouths—we know what is going on, they know what is going on, and the Secretary of State knows what is going on.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), who was present earlier, is not here. He knows what is going on, and spilled the beans the other day—he must have left his pager at home. Commenting on additionality, he said:

"I think what we said in opposition was clear".

It was—uncharacteristically so. He continued:

"it was right at the time that the National Lottery was introduced, but what we have now is a situation where the budget, the public spending level is set, and we have said that we are going to stick to that level for two years."

Not much gloss is needed on that.

It is all different now. What they now say—the hon. Gentleman made it unusally clear—is: "It was all right to make these noises about additionality when we were in opposition, and we hadn't yet thought of passing ourselves off as fiscally responsible.

But we have now, so we'll go back on everything we said then, and use the Lottery for public spending."

The hon. Gentleman served the cause of truth and honesty well. It may turn out to be the last thing he is allowed to say, but it was a good way to go.

The Government are determined to have it both ways, but they cannot square the circle. Old Labour wants higher public spending; new Labour wants to steal the money from the lottery.

I appreciate that some people may ask whether this silly technical argument really matters.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): From the right hon. Gentleman's side.

Mr. Maude: The Minister for Sport is beginning to get interested.

The fact that the Government are so concerned to argue this case and to stretch it to its limit shows that they think it matters. It also matters because the existing good causes will be short-changed as a result of the Government's lightning raid on the lottery. In Labour's original plans, the New Opportunities Fund was to succeed the millennium fund, but that was not soon enough for them. Now they cannot even wait for the Bill to receive Royal Assent. The money is being grabbed already, and as the Secretary of State, in a pre-emptive but ineffective strike, has sought to establish, the Government have introduced a provision retrospectively to legitimise this unlawful act.

The result of this precipitate greed is that £1 billion will not now be shared among the five good causes. We are familiar with the arguments: this £1 billion sprang from nowhere and is a bonus, so they will not miss it, as they were not expecting it.

Yes, they will miss it. For some time now, £10 billion has been the expected total from the lottery. Up and down the country, charities, sports clubs, heritage sites and arts projects have been expecting this larger pot to be shared among them, as was promised. That is what the recipients and the distributors expected.

Indeed, that is what many Labour councils expected. The Labour leader of Amber Valley borough council said in a letter a few days ago:

"News that the Sports Lottery planned to introduce a fund for the refurbishment of existing leisure centres . . . had been widely welcomed in the Borough. However, the scheme has not been introduced reportedly because of the need to divert resources to the New Opportunities Fund."

That is a dissatisfied customer, I am afraid.

This money is being very directly taken from these recipients, without recompense and even without an apology. It is such obvious humbug. The lottery is now expected to raise not £1 billion but £3 billion more than originally estimated. Why does the Secretary of State not take all £3 billion, because exactly the same arguments apply? It is just a windfall tax on the good causes. He knows that there is no logical reason not to take all £3 billion: it is simply that the Government thought, in their cynical way, that £1 billion was the most that they could get away with for the time being. So much for high principle and integrity.

What happens if the revenue estimates are wrong? Experience elsewhere shows that lottery revenues may plummet after a time. As the economy turns down, lottery proceeds may also turn down. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that existing good causes will receive the absolute sum to which he has referred, with the New Opportunities Fund bearing the shortfall? Or will he, when it suits him, discover that percentages matter after all? Is it a windfall tax, or is it just a tax? What if the proceeds exceed £10 billion? Who will receive the money? There are no prizes for guessing that. The good causes will not get it, not even a share of it.

Previously, these questions would not have mattered so much. The original share-out was among five good causes, which, with the temporary exception of the millennium fund, were outside ministerial control. The principle that distributors should be independent of Ministers is important. That is not always convenient for Ministers, as my right hon. and hon. Friends know well. That independence meant that Ministers did not have an interest in changing the system year by year.

That has all changed now, because the provisions of the Bill increase ministerial control. The Bill is shot through with specific measures, which look innocent in isolation, but put together create a thread of control running from the Secretary of State's office to the ultimate recipients.

Let us consider the New Opportunities Fund. Clause 6 states that it may make grants to projects

"which are designed to give effect to such initiatives concerned or connected with health, education or the environment as may from time to time be specified in an order made by the Secretary of State."

That does not sound terribly independent to me.

The fund will clearly have an incredibly wide discretion to support any project, with just one proviso: it must be approved by the Secretary of State, blessed by a Cabinet Committee, endorsed by Labour's publicity machine, and milked by Labour's spin doctors for every ounce of political advantage. Why bother to go to the trouble and expense of establishing this body? Would it not be quicker, simpler and more honest to say that this money is in Minister's back pockets, and that they will hand it out wherever they think they will get the best political payback?

The hon. Members for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) misunderstand their position. If my hon. Friends had had the power to make these dispositions, they would have given them lots of support, because we think that they are great national treasures. The threat to them comes from the Labour Government.

The Secretary of State is giving himself a straightforward piece of ministerial patronage.

Mr. Chris Smith: The right hon. Gentleman's argument becomes more absurd by the minute. The broad objectives of the New Opportunities Fund will be set first in this legislation, and secondly by subsequent orders debated, analysed, scrutinised and passed by Parliament. Individual decisions that are made within those broad parameters will be entirely up to the members of the New Opportunities Fund board, without any interference from Ministers.

Mr. Maude: Is the Secretary of State giving a commitment that every order he makes under clause 6(2)—which will become new section 43B—specifying any new initiative will be debated on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Smith: Every order specifying any new initiative under that part of the Bill must be passed by Parliament.

Mr. Maude: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to wriggle out of it. Is he giving a commitment that the House of Commons will have a chance to debate every new order setting out a new ministerial initiative for the fund to support?

Mr. Smith: The House of Commons, either on the Floor of the House or in Committee, will have the opportunity to debate each order made for any new initiative under the New Opportunities Fund. That is clear, and is implicit in the legislation.

Mr. Maude: We have been given an absolute commitment that every order will be fully debated, either

[Mr. Maude]

in Committee or on the Floor of the House. That is encouraging. I see that the Opposition Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), is making a careful note of that. We shall look forward to debating the orders at considerable length.

The next clause that raises concern is clause 11. It is a nice clause: it is about strategic plans for distributors. When the Government spokesman on culture, media and sport in the House of Lords introduced the Bill on Second Reading, he was kindly patronising about this provision. He said:

"This has been sadly lacking in the past and I know that the distributors welcome the new approach. But I should stress that these plans will belong to the distributors."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 1997; Vol. 584, c. 735.]

Many distributors want to have strategic plans, but what prevents them from having such plans at the moment? Nothing. There is only one possible explanation for this provision: it is to enable the Government to exercise more direct control over what the distributors do. It is the direct arrogation of power to ministerial offices that makes us concerned about clause 8. Under clause 11, what do the distributors have to do with the strategic plans? They have to prepare a draft and send a copy to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Chris Smith: That is clause 12.

Mr. Maude: No, I am dealing with clause 11, but my copy of the Bill may be out of date. However, if the provision is the same—

Mr. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is important to be accurate in our discussions. The right hon. Gentleman's copy of the Bill is out of date. He is speaking about clause 12, not clause 11.

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Hon. Members are responsible for the documents they use, and from which they quote.

Mr. Maude: I think that the provision is the same: it is in the same form. The Minister cannot have read it, or he would not speak so glibly about the independence of the distributors.

Subsection (5) states that the distributors must

"(b) prepare a draft of the proposed plan,

(c) send a copy of the draft to the Secretary of State, and

(d) after consultation with the Secretary of State, make such modifications to the draft as it considers necessary or expedient."

That does sound independent, does it not? Let us not hear too much about independence after that.

Mr. Chris Smith: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene again. He is getting the Bill wrong from start to finish. The strategic plan will be drawn up by the distributing body, not by the Secretary of State. If he cannot see the word "it" in the relevant subsection, I am afraid that his eyesight must be rather poor.

Mr. Maude: I think that the Minister objects to the fact that I have read the Bill and the fine print. We are not satisfied with just reading the headlines that his spin doctors create in the newspapers.

We want to be sure about the Bill, which states that the distributors have to prepare a draft, give it to the Secretary of State, talk to him about it, and amend it. If he does not appreciate that the only reason for that provision is to exert greater control over the distributors, he has not read it properly. If the provision were entirely innocent, and only about being strategic, everyone would support it. Why cannot the Government recognise that? Of course they could: it is just a fiction.

The direct arrogation of power to ministerial offices makes us concerned about the clause that gives distributors the power to solicit applications. I know that the distributors want that, and, on the face of it, it is innocuous. However, when combined with all the apparatus of massively increased ministerial control of the distributors, the clause is the final link in the chain of control between Ministers and recipients. If it is abused, it will effectively enable Ministers to decide who gets what, when and where. It amounts to a nationalisation of lottery proceeds.

If the direction of the Government's intentions needed any clarification, the way in which the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts is to be set up provides it. The advance billing was that NESTA would be, in the words of the White Paper

"a National Trust for talent and creativity".

That is set out in a nice big headline—the Government are good at headlines—but the fine print makes it look rather different. We thought that it would, like the National Trust itself, be independent. After all, why endow it with scarce capital unless it is genuinely independent?

As a trust, NESTA could be accountable to trustees in the same way as other independent trusts, but, as before, the fine print belies the headline. It will not be independent at all: it will be a quango. Its board will be appointed by the Secretary of State and his cronies, and its staff will be civil servants on the public payroll. It will have no freedom over how it invests its endowment.

Mr. Banks: What about the Arts Council and the Sports Council?

Mr. Maude: No, it is rather different. Those bodies do not operate endowments.

NESTA is meant to be independent, but it will have to invest its money with the National Debt Commissioners. That money will never leave the Treasury. Clause 19(2) states that investment will be by the National Debt Commissioners

"in accordance with any instructions given to them by NESTA."

However, before NESTA's fledgling hopes rise too high, it should be noted that subsection (3) states:

"NESTA shall comply with any directions under section 20 below."

Guess who is to give those directions Yes, it is the Secretary of State. Subsection (1)(a) states that he can require NESTA to comply with directions

"in connection with the management, control or investment of their endowment or any other money held by them;".

As a former Treasury Minister, I could not have put it better myself. The clause contains a list of devices to make NESTA yet another outpost of the ministerial empire.

No one can seriously contest the statement that those changes would hugely increase the powers that would be at the disposal of Ministers. Of itself, that would not be disastrous, except that all the evidence shows that, even without the Bill, Ministers have already been intervening, and have shown their contempt for the arm's-length principle. I shall give two examples of that, the first of which relates to the access fund for museums.

Everyone knows what a terrible mess the Secretary of State got himself into over museum charges. Labour told everyone before the general election that a Labour Government would end museum entrance charges. After the election, the Secretary of State asked the Chancellor for money to carry out that pledge, and the Chancellor, with his well-known sensitivity to the Secretary of State's predicament, told him to get stuffed. A public bidding war ensued. I do not know what the No.10 press spokesman thought about that, but I should not think that it was very polite.

There were carefully placed stories of funds for this and funds for that—£40 million here and £80 million there. There were so many funds that the Secretary of State's head must have been swimming. What did all that amount to? There was to be a fund: it was announced by the Chancellor in his Budget. It was nice of him to share the credit, but, on examination, it was apparent that it was not even his money. The amount was £9 million, of which £7 million was from the lottery.

In these cynical days, it warms one's heart to think of the spontaneous telepathy that prompted the Heritage Lottery Fund managers to conclude that a museum access fund, amid all the competing claims for their scarce funds, was after all what they particularly wanted to support. It was lovely that they felt—again quite spontaneously—that they would much prefer the Chancellor to announce it. That way it would seem to be a Government policy, and they really wanted to help the Government out of the embarrassing fix into which they had got themselves. It was all terribly convenient, and, of course, completely spontaneous and independent. It is nice when fairy tales come true.

There was an even more remarkable coincidence. The Arts Council, the Sports Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Lottery Charities Board all decided on the same day that they each wanted to chip in £25 million to help with the millennium celebrations. There was not quite as much in the millennium fund as the Government had hoped. First, it has been raided for the Government's re-election fund, and secondly, it seems that events at Greenwich are turning out to be more expensive than envisaged. Therefore, the millennium celebration, for which the millennium fund was set up, would need a bit of help from its friends.

It was not the Secretary of State's reputation but that of the Minister without Portfolio which was under threat, and that Minister has real clout. How delightful, and what a huge relief for the Minister, when the four distributors had a good look through all their pockets and found that they could each rustle up £25 million after all. Hey presto! There was £100 million to rescue the reputation of the Minister without Portfolio. It is the splendid independence and spontaneity of it all that makes one feel so glad.

If that is what Labour can contrive with a statutory framework that is designed to minimise ministerial power, there are no prizes for guessing what the Government will do if the law is changed to maximise that power. That is why we oppose the Bill. It is unprincipled and cynical. It gives unprecedented power to Ministers who have shown by their every move that they are unfit to be entrusted with it. They are treating the lottery in the way that Robert Maxwell treated pension funds.

Does not the Secretary of State realise how humiliated he has been? He is meant to be the champion of sport, charities, the arts and heritage, but he is taking money from those causes so that the Chancellor can dispense it to other more favoured colleagues. I am afraid that the Bill proves the Secretary of State's reputation beyond question. He is now the Chancellor's patsy.

5.9 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I am delighted to be called to take part in this important debate on what I consider to be one of the most important Bills that the Government have introduced in this packed Session of Parliament.

I recall vividly during the passage of what was then the National Lottery etc. Bill some three years ago, when I led for the Opposition, pledging on behalf of my party full support for a national lottery, but expressing many doubts about the way in which the legislation had been drafted. Many people within the parliamentary Labour party also had reservations about that Bill. Nevertheless, we set about finding ways to improve it, and we were successful in obtaining several amendments.

For example, we managed to give some kind of level playing field to the pools companies. I say "some kind" of level playing field because it certainly has not been a true level playing field to date, and the pools companies have been hit enormously hard by the national lottery. However, we did obtain for them the ability to roll over prize money, the legalisation of the sale of coupons in shops, and permission to be allowed to sponsor television and radio programmes. Nevertheless, the pools have been significantly affected by the lottery. For example, in 1994, the pools companies paid £350 million in betting duty, but the figure has shrunk to £131 million today.

We also sought and achieved concessions to enable small charities and the lottery to compete, by raising the limit on the size of small lotteries to £1 million, and to prevent the national lottery from selling door to door in order to protect public collections. We also sought certain social safeguards. Whereas we wanted the sale of lottery tickets to be restricted to 18-year-olds and above, in line with the restriction for the pools companies, the then Government brought down the age to 16 in both cases—that was some kind of level playing field, but not the kind that we sought. I could go on about the improvements that we made to the National Lottery etc. Bill, but we did not stop there.

In 1995, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the then shadow Secretary of State for National Heritage, set up an advisory committee on which I served along with representatives of business, local government, Churches and charities. Its remit was to examine the lottery and suggest ways to improve the running of it. We consulted, we shared ideas, and we listened; we then published the best ideas in a paper entitled "The National Lottery Initiatives and Recommendations".

I remind the House of some of the recommendations. They included the creation of new beneficiaries from lottery money, more flexible distribution, the development

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

of a strategic approach to distributors, fast tracking for small grants, giving access to children's play, and introducing a national endowment scheme, all of which have been included in this Bill, which tells me that the Government are listening to those who are making constructive suggestions.

At the same time, however, I want to put on record a few issues that I trust the Government, in the spirit of openness that they have shown so far, will deal with as the Bill progresses through the House. I have only 10 minutes in which to speak, so I shall confine my remarks to one issue alone—sport and the lottery.

My major concern is quite simply that the Bill represents a watering down of Labour's previous commitment to sport. Although sport has been one of the great beneficiaries, and sport's governing bodies have always placed on record their strong support for sport being one of the good causes, I trust that it will remain a permanent good cause after 2001. I am disappointed that the Government have not made such a firm commitment in the Bill.

All I ask is that we adhere to our promise in the manifesto, which I launched with numerous sports stars during the general election. It states:

"Sport will continue to be a permanent good cause for the purpose of Lottery Funding".

All I ask is that when he replies, the Minister for Sport spells that out once and for all.

I welcome the New Opportunities Fund, because it addresses the Government's and the people's priorities, but I hope that the Government will recognise that sport and recreation are very much a people's priority. It is estimated that each week more than 22 million adults and 7 million children participate in sporting activity—that is almost 60 per cent. of the total population. However, I heard what the Secretary of State said today, and I am sure that his words address that point. I want to see those figures increased.

One of my top priorities was to promote sporting opportunities for all areas. Access was the watchword. I am glad that the Government have got off to a pretty good start by accepting some proposals, such as that to protect some playing fields. However, there is more to be done in that connection—for example, I believe that the playing fields of colleges of further education should be included. However, I must chide the Government for removing sport from the list of compulsory subjects on the national curriculum without even consulting the interested sporting groups. That has to be rectified.

I hope that the New Opportunities Fund will not neglect the impact that sport can make on the twin priorities of health and education. Academic success is enhanced through physical education. A recent study concluded:

"Students who are involved in sport tend to perform as well, or better, academically than less active students, even though academic curriculum time is reduced."

I am especially concerned that no urban primary school has yet received sports lottery money. In total, just eight such schools have received that money, but all have been in leafy shire districts—none in deprived urban areas.

I should like to make another practical suggestion to improve sports funding. In our sports manifesto "Labour's Sporting Nation", we promised that the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts would offer support for sportspeople. Page 10 of that document states:

"The endowment will not focus solely on excellence, it will be inclusive in its approach, encouraging access and partnership across the whole range of earth sciences, humanities, sports and arts."

I am highly disappointed therefore that that commitment to sport, which I personally wrote into that document, is being dropped by the Government. If they are intent on doing that, I have a suggestion as to how they can assist sport through NESTA in another way.

If the Government are determined to exclude the development of sporting talent from NESTA's remit because of the Sports Council's involvement with existing sports organisations, using lottery funding for such development, I suggest that the Secretary of State can nevertheless find a useful and worthwhile sporting role within NESTA's remit—it can ensure the development of sports science, which is crucial for the enhancement of world-class sport within the United Kingdom sports institute network. It could also play a key role in the development of sports information technology, providing coaching and advice on nutrition and medicine for our potential world-class performers and, indeed, for our schools.

I mentioned the impact of the lottery on the football pools, and at this point I should like to declare an interest. As the House may know, I have recently been appointed chairman of the Football Trust. In the run-up to the general election, the trust campaigned to secure national lottery distributor status. Having lost some 60 per cent. of its annual income as a result of the lottery, that represented the most straightforward way of ensuring that the trust could continue its essential work for football throughout the United Kingdom.

Labour's proposal for the development of sport in "Labour's Sporting Nation" included the following commitment:

"We'll make the Football Trust the recipient of Lottery money so it may continue its essential work for football at all levels throughout the United Kingdom".

Once in government, rather than extend distributor status, Labour decided that it would be appropriate for the trust to form partnerships with the Sports Councils in order to have access to lottery funding. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that in England the Sports Council and the football authorities have shown a great willingness to enter into partnership. As a result, the trust is able to continue to help the game at all levels in England.

We are also, we hope, in the last stages of putting together a successful partnership in Scotland, and I have opened discussions with the Sports Councils and the football authorities in Wales and Northern Ireland. It is essential that those also result in the formation of successful partnerships.

The trust's contribution to the game throughout the United Kingdom is vital. It has a huge part to play in maintaining football's place in the community. We are not only about bricks and mortar, but can handle grant-aid programmes of every sort, including revenue grants for community involvement and player development. If we are to continue our important work, the Sports Councils must play their part, which means that they in turn must continue to receive the resources to enable them to do so. The creation of the six good causes is to be welcomed,

but we must ensure that sport continues to benefit from lottery funding to the appropriate degree and that the Sports Councils channel football's fair share of it through the Football Trust.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will not think that I have been anything other than constructive, because I welcome the Bill and certainly give it two cheers. I trust that the Government will listen to what I have said and, more particularly, to what sports bodies on the ground have said, and recognise the strength of their case. I hope to come back to the House in a few months' time and give the Bill three good cheers.

5.19 pm

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): I think that it is common ground among hon. Members on both sides of the House that the lottery has been a stunning success over the past few years. The very fact that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is introducing a Bill that re-regulates the lottery in some fashion and that makes other changes shows the extent to which it has become a national institution in a short time.

Let me say at the outset: I am not opposed to any changes to the original Bill that was presented a few years ago. The situation is evolving. It was an evolutionary scheme. It was expected to evolve, and some of the Secretary of State's changes, subject to more careful examination, I have no qualms about at all. It is sensible for him to look at new regulatory provision in the light of experience, and I am delighted that he has introduced measures for us to examine.

The Secretary of State announced that consultation would take place on policy directives. We have not, of course, seen those directives yet, so I do not intend to give them blanket approval. If I heard him correctly, there is the prospect of moving rather more from capital funding to revenue funding, which was always envisaged at the outset and, again, is perfectly sensible. The only points at issue are the specific details of what is proposed and the timing. It is, I think, a natural evolution.

The Secretary of State will forgive me if, having said that, I make the point that to issue more directives of this sort flatly contradicts what the Government said in opposition, when they remarked repeatedly and powerfully that decisions of this sort should be left to the distributing bodies. That was their position in opposition. They wanted the then Government to be at arm's length from the money.

I had much sympathy with that view and did not dispute it when the Opposition made it a particular cause of theirs during the passage of the first Bill, but we now know that what they meant was that they wanted the Conservative Government to be at arm's length from the money, while the incoming Labour Government should get their sticky fingers on it, either by directives or directly, as speedily as they could. No wonder the Secretary of State had his tongue so far in his cheek during his speech. I was surprised from time to time that he did not choke.

I shall refer to some of the background, and then I have a couple of specific questions to ask, which are pertinent to lottery fund distributors and beneficiaries. When we decided to establish the lottery, there was much opposition to it. I should like to explain briefly why I thought that it was the right thing to do; this Bill illustrates why we thought that it was important, although we oppose some tiny elements of the Bill.

I believed, and still believe, that the arts, sport and the built heritage enhance the quality of life for everyone. They are part of a rounded life, yet the opportunity for everyone to enjoy them was clearly not there. Some people were more capable than others of viewing or taking part in sports and the arts.

I was concerned to ensure that a child who lived in a tower block had the same opportunity in arts and sport as the child who was the heir to rolling acres. It was part, if I may return to an old phrase, of what I thought of as a classless society. That intention was always implicit in our Bill.

We wanted to help small charities, particularly unfashionable small charities, which do tremendous work and have such dedicated supporters, but find it difficult to raise money. We also wanted to prepare for something that we shall never see again in our lifetime—the millennium—and ensure that it could be properly celebrated, as it should be. That is how the five good causes were born in the original Bill, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) piloted superbly through the House; my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) carried forward its ideas during her tenure as Secretary of State.

Why those causes? Why those of all the other good causes, some of which every hon. Member could name? It was largely because they were under-resourced and would always be under-resourced by any Government. For any Government—Conservative, Labour or mishmash—the competing demands of health, education, pensions and defence will always come first, because that is where the pressure and the need have always traditionally been. The purpose of the lottery was to raise funds without taxation for those essential components of our national life. British talent in the arts is immense. Much of it is tapped; much of it is still untapped. The lottery is helping to tap it, and the British affection for sport is not doubted by anyone in the House.

I believed that the lottery and the funding flow that would follow, were it to be successful—and it has been stunningly successful—would revolutionise both sport and the arts and preserve for future generations much of the built heritage that would otherwise disappear. That is what the lottery has achieved and will go on achieving if the flow of funds continues, as I expect that it will.

For those reasons, the lottery was underpinned by two objectives: first, that resources should be additional to existing public expenditure; and, secondly, that other areas of expenditure—very important, but legitimate taxpayer-borne expenditure—should be specifically excluded. Despite what the Secretary of State has said, in some aspects—not all, but in some aspects—of the New Opportunities Fund, he has strayed across the line into new areas of funding.

The argument about additionality is being conducted on the wrong basis. The point is: are the Government now using money for areas that are beyond the remit of the original five good causes? In one or two restricted areas, they are, and I shall try to set out later what those areas are.

This new money—this lottery money—was never expected to be just for professional arts or professional sport; indeed, the contrary is true. Some of it was, of course, but it was mainly for schools, clubs and local arts

[Mr. John Major]

groups. I am delighted that the vast majority of the awards have been made to local groups and have been for under £100,000, which is small in the context of Government expenditure, but massive in the context of what those small groups and clubs were doing to provide a cricket pitch, a swimming pool or a new arts club. Throughout the country, there was a revolution in facilities for people to enjoy, through either participation or watching.

Lottery money was intended as capital provision in the first instance, for sound reasons that the House well understands. The aim was to build the facilities, but the implication was always there, that we would move beyond capital funding to revenue funding in due course. I thoroughly agreed with that, in certain cases with individual sponsorship as well. I have no objection to that in certain cases.

No greater pleasure is given to people than when a great athlete or artist thrills the world with their particular abilities. I remember how the House practically came to a stop when Torvill and Dean mopped up, winning gold medals all over the place. I have no objection to individual sponsorship to produce more Torvills and more Deans and, if we could find a few fast bowlers as well, I should be even happier.

The lottery has been a huge success throughout the country. Look, for example, at the Derby dance centre, the Cambridge Arts theatre, which I know extremely well, or the arts for everyone express scheme. Look—this lies within the responsibility of the Minister for Sport—at the national stadium or the UK sports institute. It is unthinkable that they could have been established without the lottery over recent years.

Everyone in this debate wishes that to continue, but, for it to do so, two conditions are necessary: first, lottery funding should continue to be additional and, secondly, it should not be reduced and siphoned off to some other sector. The Secretary of State has re-endorsed the additionality principle. I shall not go through the debate between my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and the Secretary of State and others. The Secretary of State has re-endorsed the additionality principle, and I welcome that. When he says it, I hope that the Treasury means it and will not come back to him later to change his mind directly, by pager or in any other fashion. I hope that he will stick to the additionality principle. If there are arguments to be had, they should be at the margins.

A small part—or perhaps not so small; we do not yet know—of the New Opportunities Fund will use lottery money for what I envisaged would always be tax-based expenditure. I have no problems with some elements of the New Opportunities Fund, but expenditure on children's play, coaching in literacy and numeracy and science and technology—all of which are worthy areas for expenditure—should properly be tax-borne.

The lottery is substituting for what we all, including the Secretary of State, know should be tax-borne expenditure. That is a source of grievance to us and to the distributing bodies. Although they have had their hands twisted up their back to agree with what they know that the Government, with their tame majority, will do, they feel strongly that the money has been taken from them for other purposes. Those areas of expenditure are not, not, not in the original spirit of the lottery. They infringe the principles that Labour demanded of the previous Government when the original Bill went through the House. Demanding something in opposition and ignoring it in government is not the way to receive support and inspire confidence in those who are distributing lottery money.

The Government are raiding the lottery, raising the fear that they will do it again—and possibly again and again. The danger of that is self-evident. One virtue of the lottery was that people could see continued funding that would enable the distributing authorities to think big, to think long and to be ambitious in their spread of spending over several years. The Bill and the New Opportunities Fund—I ask the Secretary of State to reflect on this and not to react immediately—have created uncertainty where there was confidence. I hope that the distributors have said that privately to the Secretary of State. They are saying it privately to us. They are uncertain where once they were certain. It is in the Secretary of State's power to remove that uncertainty. I hope that he or the Minister for Sport, who will wind up the debate, will do so.

Many of the fears of the distributing bodies and much of the controversy of the Bill would be removed by assurances on two questions, which I shall spell out for the Secretary of State. As a result of the New Opportunities Fund, the share of lottery funds for the other good causes will fall from 20 per cent. to 16⅔ per cent. The Government have always said that that does not matter because the good causes will still receive the £1.8 billion each that was originally envisaged. The Government claim that they are merely redistributing the funds raised by the extra success of the lottery. It has raised £10 billion instead of £9 billion and the Government claim to be taking only the extra £1 billion.

I shall not repeat the excellent arguments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham on that, but the Secretary of State must know that his argument is pure sophistry. It is spurious. When the 20 per cent. level was agreed, no one knew what the cash figure would be. The percentages were always at the heart of the proposals, because nobody knew what future revenue would be. Suppose that the economy begins to contract and the excellent growth rate that the Government were fortunate enough to inherit begins to slip away. That would have many effects on the economy, including a reduction in lottery resources, resulting in a smaller pot from which to distribute to the five good causes—now to be six. The reduced percentage would then really begin to bite and resentment would grow. The Secretary of State should reflect and instruct his colleague to remove that apprehension this evening.

I do not think that the new estimate of £10 billion will be an underestimate. If more than £10 billion is raised, where will the extra go? Will it go to the original good causes, to the New Opportunities Fund or to both? That is highly relevant to the fears of the arts and sports distributors. The Government know that it is more than likely that the £10 billion estimate will be exceeded. The Minister for Sport nodded when I said that, so the Government are clearly aware of the issue and have considered it. They must know what they plan to do with any excess. I waited for the Secretary of State to tell us, but he did not mention the subject. I hope that he will have decided before the end of the debate. Who gets any money over £10 billion and in what proportions?

My second question is equally straightforward. The distributing bodies need security to plan ahead. That is not a wicked point from the previous Government, but one of the points that were implicit in the White Paper, "A People's Lottery". I hope that the Secretary of State will forgive me if I digress for a moment, but I hope that the Government will grow out of their silly sloganising. We have long known that any country that is called a democratic republic is notably undemocratic. Anything called the people's something gives the people a good deal less say than they had before. We have a people's lottery, a people's money and cool Britannia.

I am sure that the Secretary of State is ambitious—although I am not sure whether it is to be Prime Minister or mayor of London. Does he think that Mr. Attlee would have used such sloganising? I hope that he will decide that it is undignified and will drop it. It is not doing the country or the Government any good. When I hear Ministers producing such claptrap, I blush for them. When the Secretary of State came to the part of his speech about the people's lottery, he buried his head in his script. I am short-sighted—an accusation that was also levelled at my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham—but I thought that even the Secretary of State's ears went pink.

Will the Government guarantee the percentage for the good causes beyond 2001—for 10 years or some other period? If not, why not? The White Paper said that the distributing bodies needed to be able to take a long-term view and that they needed certainty. There is only one reason why the Secretary of State is not prepared to give that guarantee—the Treasury will not let him. The Treasury must be keeping open the option of a further smash-and-grab raid on the existing good causes.

Given the Government's substantial majority, the Secretary of State will get the Bill through the House. However, a failure to answer my question will cause disruption and concern for those who make the lottery live by distributing the money to the good causes, severely damaging their confidence in their future and what they can do with the long, continuing flow of lottery resources.

I have asked the Secretary of State two clear questions. If he is not clear about them, I shall speak to him or his officials outside, so that he can be absolutely clear about what I seek. I am going to a significant arts event elsewhere this evening, but I shall miss most of it because I want to come back for the winding-up speeches to hear answers to my questions. I hope that the Government put at rest the minds of those who distribute money throughout the country. *[Interruption.]* I did not hear what the Minister for Sport just said.

Mr. Banks: Trust us.

Mr. Major: Where have I heard that before? "No new taxes—trust me," said the Minister for Sport's boss. The Government have broken promise after promise. We shall soon find out about the Minister for Sport. I know that he will be here at 9.30 this evening because Chelsea are not playing. I shall be here to hear him answer my two questions.

If the Minister is in answering mode, perhaps he can answer one or two other questions. Who will bear the cost of setting up the New Opportunities Fund? I hope that it will not be the other good causes, for that would rub salt into an already open wound. Will the Minister answer that at 9.30? Will he also confirm whether there will be further endowments to NESTA at the expense of the other good causes? He must know the answer to that. He cannot ignore the question: either he answers it, or everybody will make the only assumption that they can, that the Government will take more money away. I hope that, in the interests of arts, sports and other fund distributors, the Minister will give us unequivocal answers this evening.

I shall reiterate one point. I am not, in Luddite fashion, opposing any changes, because I was particularly in favour of the National Lottery etc. Bill, which was introduced when I was Prime Minister. Times change; we learn from experience. There are changes are to be made, and I shall support them, but some of the Secretary of State's changes are wrong. I would have made other changes—he mentioned one of them. He was right; I would, for example, post millennium, have devoted the sums that are going to the millennium fund to the provision of sports coaching and arts teaching, across—as far as the money would stretch—our mainstream education system. I want us to win the World cup, the five nations trophy, the test matches, the Davis cup. Rooting a love of sport and the arts in schools would have been the right thing to do. Even though the Secretary of State used that suggestion to make a false point, it is absolutely consistent with the sport and arts element of the existing good causes. I was proposing to use money after the millennium fund ended, in order to extend the principles. However, in advance of it ending, the Government have got their sticky fingers on the cash.

Despite the Government's astonishing honeymoon, we are coming to know them and how they manoeuvre whenever they are under any pressure at all. They are never too scrupulous in pursuit of their own interests. I hope that, this evening, they will redeem themselves just a little by giving clear-cut answers that show that they will not further pervert the original intention of the lottery, which has so far proceeded with outstanding success.

5.41 pm

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I very much welcome the Bill. It is important that people have confidence in the lottery, and that means proper regulation. I say with absolutely no embarrassment that for me, the lottery is the people's lottery, as it reflects the people's priorities as they have expressed them. I particularly welcome the New Opportunities Fund, which will put money into healthy living centres and out-of-hours primary and secondary school clubs. That is in line with our manifesto promises, for which people voted.

Part of the Bill provides for a more even distribution of lottery funding. It gives distributors new rights to assess local needs and to solicit applications from organisations where too little lottery money has been spent. I welcome clause 12, which provides for strategic plans, as the piecemeal approach adopted hitherto has not always resulted in the best or fairest use of lottery moneys.

If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will forgive me, I shall use the example of my constituency to make points about distribution. It is necessary to highlight the way in which my constituency has—or, rather, has not—been the recipient of lottery funds. In the ranking of the number of awards to constituencies, it comes 628th, and 636th in terms of the value of the awards. In other words,

[Mr. Ben Chapman]

however one slices the cake, the situation is not good. My constituency has been inequitably treated. It is no wonder that the Tories lost the seat at the by-election in 1997.

There is an apparent general mismatch between the allocation of lottery funding and the areas in greatest need of assistance. Since the lottery began, my constituency has received just short of £400,000—none of which has come from the Millennium Commission, the national heritage memorial fund or the Sports Council. That compares with an average lottery money distribution per constituency of £7.5 million. My arithmetic is not very good, but I think that that is a ratio of 20:1—despite a desperate lack of, for example, sport and youth facilities across my constituency.

Recently, the West Wirral Trust for Sports submitted an application for a much-needed project, but with no success. The project would, I believe, have benefited not just my constituency, but those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral, West (Mr. Hesford) and for Wallasey (Angela Eagle). The trust was told that its application failed because it was not in a priority area. Apparently, the west of the Wirral is judged to be relatively well off. However, the constituency has major areas of need, not just financially, but functionally.

The problem with judging applications on a competitive and piecemeal basis is that, too often, those who are best at putting together applications, rather than those who have the greatest need, get the rewards. The situation compounds itself. Thus, for example, areas that have resources to put together expertise to bid successfully for city challenge funding use those resources to bid successfully for single regeneration budget money. With the skills base further enhanced, they can bid for European funds and then lottery moneys. Money, as they say, goes to money. With the need for matching funding and, often, a partnership approach, that is increasingly so. It results in funding not necessarily going to those who need it. That is why I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today.

My constituency fundamentally comprises small communities rather than large towns or a city. It does not have a preponderance of professional organisations with expertise in fund-raising. That does not, of course, mean that the need does not exist—quite the reverse. Only 12 applications from groups or organisations in the constituency have been successful. That represents less than a quarter of the applications made. In the rest of the Wirral, just under half the applications submitted have been successful—even though the constituencies there also receive less than the national average.

Mr. Green: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the creation of a new good cause under, more or less, the Minister's direct control makes it less likely that bids from his constituency will be successful because there will be less money to go around?

Mr. Chapman: I do not accept that point at all, as I shall explain later.

If the House will forgive me, I shall go through a few figures. My constituents receive on average £5.71 per person compared with £14.01 per person across the north-west of England. The north-west receives 16.8 per cent. of lottery money, while Wirral, South receives 0.41 per cent. and Merseyside 1.4 per cent. That distribution cannot appropriately reflect needs across the communities. Wirral, South gets less than the people in the rest of the Wirral; Wirral gets less than Merseyside as a whole; Merseyside gets less than the north-west; and the north-west gets less than the rest of the United Kingdom. That cannot be right. It puts us at the bottom of the heap.

There is imbalance not just when comparing constituencies. As in other spheres, there is a major north-south divide. In the past, the bulk of resources went to what are called "national institutions" in London. However, many arts and cultural organisations, including museums, in the provinces, for example, are in dire crisis and need money just to stabilise and survive. I recognise the importance of what is in the Bill for community groups, for example, but let us not stop considering—if we can—giving help to organisations outside London. Let us consider, for example, organisations such as the national museums and galleries on Merseyside, the Williamson art gallery and the royal Liverpool philharmonic orchestra. Such organisations are crucial to the quality of our lives.

Many groups bring their problems to my attention weekly. As I have said, the need is clearly there, and as the Bill says, we need to help small community groups—but the methods and skills required to secure funding are often lacking. We should turn our attention to that. That is how my constituents could get more money, despite the additional distribution proposed in the Bill. Groups and organisations need to co-operate, not to compete, for funding for the same type of provision.

There are many reasons why lottery bids fail. Incorrectly and poorly filled-out application forms are the most common. The National Lottery Charities Board needs, of course, to know that its criteria are being met, but organisations often fail to convey that when they complete their applications. Less experienced groups and organisations inevitably tend to be unaware that they must convince the NLCB that they can handle the additional funds and are legally entitled to receive them.

To ensure that a more equitable and balanced distribution is achieved, those issues, so vividly highlighted in my constituency, must be addressed. More help, guidance and instruction needs to be obtained for the smaller groups and those that are not "professionalised" in that sense, so that they can compete for the vast but finite resources available through the lottery.

Mr. Hawkins: In talking about the difficulties of smaller groups, will the hon. Gentleman not pay tribute to those who work for the lottery distributive bodies, who have always been prepared to give freely of their time and talents to help groups put sensible and acceptable bids together? Does he accept that the real role of all of us as Members of Parliament of all parties is to encourage those groups to work with the lottery distributive bodies and other organisations in putting together acceptable bids?

Mr. Chapman: I readily accept that that is so, up to a point—but it has not happened enough. Many groups are unaware of the opportunities and of how to proceed. The measures that will allow distributors to assess local needs will address those problems. I welcome them, and know that my constituents will do so too.

The Tories oversaw the crazy lottery distribution process that we have seen hitherto. I am thankful that those days are over and that the lottery is being returned to a more sensible basis of allocation. The Bill is good news, and will bring back to the lottery the confidence that was so undermined by the Tories. It deals with people's needs and tackles the problems of distribution. I commend it, and am delighted to support it.

5.51 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The debate is novel in a number of ways. Perhaps the most gratifying novelty has been the opportunity to follow a speech by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), from the Back Benches on a major Bill. I have always thought that he missed his vocation, and that the role of constructive opposition was one that he could fulfil without challenge and without peer.

The right hon. Gentleman made the best possible case for the lottery—a case which has not always been made so strongly or clearly—and about why the particular heads of expenditure originally conceived made some sense. However, it could not be said, and cannot be said by the present Government either, that those necessarily conformed with the people's perceptions of their priorities for public expenditure. Indeed, the very converse of that is the justification of the peculiarities of the particular good causes that the lottery funds. It is because the Government are, in a sense, trying to have their cake and eat it, that the contents of the Bill are not entirely welcome.

I must admit that, as the Minister is well aware, I come to the debate with a studied ambivalence, for I was not one of the proponents of the Bill in principle. There I differ again from the former Prime Minister, in that I do not see the lottery as the archetypal exemplar of the classless society at work, or even as something that would greatly assist the achievement of the classless society.

I fear that, although it is a voluntary levy, the lottery bears hardest on those least able to pay. I admit to a certain moral revulsion when I see people whom I know are in deep poverty spending money that I doubt whether they can afford on the lottery. In taking that view of the lottery, I am no killjoy. I realise that hope lends encouragement to such poor people—but their hopes of being richly rewarded are slender indeed.

The second novel feature is that we are debating a Bill that will be very different from that which concluded its passage through the House of Lords, in that, since then, the Government have announced a major change in the regulation of the lottery, and seek to substitute a commission for the role of the director general. In an intervention, I have already welcomed that move. Indeed, I put the proposal to the Minister across the Floor of the House a few weeks ago, and I am pleased that he has seen the merits of the argument made with considerable force by, among others, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

The management experienced under the former director general, Mr. Peter Davis, was one that I, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, could not regard as exemplary. I understand why the Secretary of State said what he did about Mr. Peter Davis's tenure. None the less, that tenure fell far short of what the House expected of the regulator.

To avoid problems of regulatory capture, the possibility of behaviour that suggests an identity of view between the regulated body and the regulator, and a certain loss of awareness of the need to protect the beneficiaries of the lottery and the clients—those who spend on the lottery—the widening of the regulatory body is important.

The third novelty—although it is perhaps not quite so novel as the others—has been the announcement in the debate of a wide-ranging directive from the Minister that will redirect the expenditure by the funding bodies. Like the former Prime Minister, I do not wish to jump to too speedy a conclusion about what the Secretary of State said. It sounded much in line with the priorities that I would have for redirecting the funding, but I should like to examine it more closely.

It is sensible to have a wider geographical spread. Many of the causes that the Minister appears to espouse—such as the importance of access and of facilities for young people and children—are priorities which no one would quarrel with. I know that the distributing bodies have endeavoured to make some of those priorities a feature of their performance.

Part of the difficulty was the need to get off the mark quickly with very large sums, which could most easily be deployed by bodies with well-established development plans. It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that major capital expenditure went to some of the best-financed bodies because they were already sitting there ready for development.

Some of those major bodies in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), which were noticed by another hon. Member, were national bodies from which people from the whole of the United Kingdom, including my constituents in the far north of Scotland, have derived benefit. Geography cannot be more than a factor in deciding the appropriateness of particular directions.

I have expressed my moral tentativeness about the lottery, but I accept that it has provided much cash for the arts, as well as for charities, heritage support and projects to mark the millennium. The lottery has enabled many activities to take place throughout the country, but there have been victims, such as the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, which, before the lottery's establishment, supported many projects and exemplified in its distribution of funds the priorities that the Secretary of State's new direction to the lottery appears to embrace.

The main fact remains that the lottery, having provided a welcome source of alternative funding for areas such as the arts, is covering an unattractive trend in arts expenditure, for which, I regret to say, the Secretary of State is in part responsible. Since 1992, central Government expenditure has increased by about 15 per cent., whereas spending on culture has fallen by 23 per cent. I am informed that the Department's arts budget for last year constituted only 0.073 per cent. of total Government spending: one of the lowest figures in Europe.

That is a somewhat depressing state of affairs. It is tempting to eulogise what the lottery has done in raising significant sums to be spent on the arts and sport. We must recognise, however, that the prospects are for considerably reduced expenditure from what was anticipated when the lottery was set up and, indeed, during its more recent operation.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

I do not quarrel with the Secretary of State's figures or deny that the lottery has, in some ways, been more successful in raising funds than was anticipated, but I think that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon was right to draw attention to the percentage of expenditure as the crucial key to giving security to the grant-giving bodies. Like him, I will listen carefully to the Secretary of State to hear whether we are to be given any assurances on that point.

There was a passage at arms between the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and the Secretary of State about whether the Government might freely change further the direction of expenditure in the course of the development of their thinking about where the people's priorities might lie. There was a somewhat technical and legalistic argument about whether that would be done with or without the approval of the House.

It seems to me that clause 14 contains a requirement for an affirmative procedure for any such change, but in a House in which the Government have a majority of 179, the Secretary of State or, perhaps more important, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, would probably not find that an obstacle to implementing changes such as those already outlined.

Those changes, it is true, will not have the authority of a party manifesto, but I have never known that to stop a Government enunciating what they perceive to be the people's interests. That argument from the Government must be challenged head on. It may be true that healthy living centres are close to the heart of the people, but so are bobbies on the beat and 101 other matters, such as cutting hospital waiting lists and improving local medical facilities.

There is nothing in the Bill's drafting to curtail in the slightest the possibility of raiding the lottery to fund central essential services that are close to the perceived wishes and needs of the people. If that happens, the lottery will have served its time, and it will be better for the House to revisit the whole issue and consider whether it is not more equitable and less regressive to raise taxation directly to pay for the central funding of centrally provided services.

The Secretary of State kindly responded to my intervention about whether it would be preferable to entrust a separate body—or an individual supported by advisers—with the task of choosing the new lottery franchise holder, and to separate that function from the subsequent regulation. He has demonstrated his open-mindedness in his approach to the Bill.

With the best will in the world, and notwithstanding the undoubted integrity and independence of the five good men and women whom the Secretary of State will, no doubt, appoint shortly, they are bound to be influenced by the consequences of their choice in considering the behaviour that they witness. They will find it difficult to stand totally at arm's length from the company that they are regulating and not to give it the benefit of the doubt. That is a well-recognised feature of regulation, of which the Secretary of State is obviously aware. I do not make the point with dogmatism, but merely ask him to reconsider it as the Bill proceeds.

Members of the Public Accounts Committee are certainly aware that, under Mr. Davis's regime, when there was any discretion on what to do with unexpected funds released by the lottery, that discretion was almost invariably exercised in favour of Camelot, and not of either the good causes or the punters. That is partly an institutional problem, and not entirely Mr. Davis's fault.

The Government must come a little further with us on the new good causes and the New Opportunities Fund. At least at this stage, in widening the causes, they are relying on utterances made before the general election, but it cannot be said or thought that that is without cost. The new activity will take away about 20 per cent. of the money that would otherwise have gone to the arts, sports, charities and heritage.

The Arts Council budget for this year has been cut by £8 million in real terms and, in conjunction with the Bill's proposal to remove another £50 million a year from the lottery proceeds for the arts and other causes, that means that the balance sheet is becoming less obviously weighted in the direction of the arts. For the majority of our arts organisations, this is the sixth consecutive year of either a cash standstill or a cash reduction, equivalent to an 18 per cent. cut in real terms.

Mr. Chris Smith: I gently point out to the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have considerable respect, that two weeks ago, I was able to announce an additional £5 million for the performing arts, which somewhat changes the picture—not completely, but it helps.

Mr. Maclennan: It would not have been fair of me not to acknowledge that point, but it does not rectify the decline in real terms of the Department's expenditure on the arts.

I listened with particular interest to the former Prime Minister talking about how he has witnessed lively developments in the arts due directly to the intervention of the lottery. Like him, I have visited the Cambridge arts theatre. Like him, I have also visited Greenwich theatre with great pleasure, but it is now condemned to death. The Secretary of State would not deny that development of the live and performing arts is patchy. Greenwich theatre was not saved by the interventions of the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) when she was a Minister. Other theatres—to confine it to theatres—in the south-east have been affected.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): On arts funding, does the right hon. Gentleman know the total lottery arts funding so far?

Mr. Maclennan: Yes, the figures have been widely canvassed, and Governments of both colours have taken much credit for what has happened, but the right hon. Lady must know what happened to the theatre in Farnham. I hope that she does not take satisfaction from that.

Mrs. Bottomley *rose—*

Mr. Maclennan: The right hon. Lady will no doubt make her own justificatory speech. Other hon. Members have confined themselves to short speeches and I have already gone on longer than some.

The Bill gives distributing bodies the power to solicit applications and to be proactive. In a way, I understand that, but it does not reflect the people's priorities. It also

seems likely that, because of the reduction in funding, much of the strategic planning of those bodies will involve making less than adequate resources go round. That is regrettable.

In some ways, the Bill is an improvement in lottery regulation, but it is a step back in its widening of the ambit of the lottery's good causes. I therefore cannot possibly support it, but I do not feel minded to vote against it either.

6.11 pm

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate, because my first nervous words in the Chamber were to ask the Secretary of State about his plans to make the lottery more relevant to ordinary people. In my supplementary, I raised my concern that people in rural areas should receive an equal and fair share of lottery funding.

It was clear, both before the general election and subsequently, that many people wanted the proceeds of the lottery to go to health and education projects. That was demonstrated by the responses to the lottery White Paper, with 90 per cent. supporting the suggestion.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Is that 90 per cent. of the 600 or so responses or a smaller figure? If it is a smaller figure, what is it?

Mrs. Organ: I am talking about 90 per cent. of the 600 responses.

Mr. Brooke: I fear that the hon. Lady is wrong.

Mrs. Organ: I stand corrected. There is overwhelming evidence that people see the opportunity for the lottery to put money into the enrichment of education and health. They want young talent in arts and sciences to be nurtured. They want an improvement in how existing good causes benefit. They want to make them more relevant and applicable to a wider range of people. The Government have listened to what people have to say and put the reforms in the Bill. The new strategic approach of basing distribution on grassroots need and allowing the soliciting of applications, rather than waiting for the right ones to drop on the desk, will ensure that rural areas such as the Forest of Dean have a better chance of getting their fair share.

Continuing my interest in the lottery, I tabled my first early-day motion, principally as a response to the announcement last summer of the grossly inflated remuneration packages of some directors of Camelot. I called on the Government, on the expiry of the current licence, to seek an efficient not-for-profit operator that would maximise the sums distributed to good causes across the country. The Secretary of State said that the Bill would not make provision for a not-for-profit operator, but I am convinced that the Government are concerned to ensure the best possible return for good causes in considering renewal of the licence in 2001.

My early-day motion also asked the Government to establish a new lottery good cause to support initiatives in health and education that fall outside the services provided through taxation. Having taught for 20 years, I am chiefly interested in helping children to enrich and widen their school experience. The programme of after-school activities and learning is crucial to such enrichment.

I humbly admit that my prompting through my question and early-day motion is not why the initiatives were included in the Bill. With millions of others, I celebrate the fact that they were. Those requests were met because people believe that it is their lottery, and they want it to be the people's lottery. It is undoubtedly successful, a national institution enjoyed regularly by about 65 per cent. of the adult population. Some 95 per cent. of the adult population have played it at one time or another, although I never have. That is partly to do with my puritanical upbringing.

Millions of people play; they play to win the jackpot or lesser prizes, but also so that their communities, villages or sports can win. They want the money to be used to good effect. They do not view it as stealing, but as the deployment of resources into extras that could not normally be funded. They also want it to be run effectively and efficiently. They regard it as a massive fund to deliver opportunities and enrichment, and improvement of local facilities and activities. People could not care less about the arguments about coming under taxation or stealing from the lottery. They just want these things there. The lottery can provide them.

Lottery projects are not replacing Government provision or expenditure. They are not the cake or even the icing on the cake; they are the ribbon and candles that will make the cake special. That is especially true in respect of the development of a national network of after-school clubs under the New Opportunities Fund. The money that the fund will provide will be particularly appreciated in rural areas, which, until now, have not done as well out of the lottery as urban areas. As a widespread network involving half our secondary schools and a quarter of the primary schools, it will reach isolated rural communities. It will enrich the lives of children and young people. It will provide an opportunity for an after-school club in nearly every village and market town. It will bring real added value to education. It will offer opportunities not currently available to thousands of young people in small, isolated rural communities.

Young people in rural areas suffer more than their urban counterparts from having nothing to do and nowhere to go out of school hours. They can feel lonely and alienated from their village community. The three or four hanging around the village cross or telephone are very visible. They often turn to drugs, under-age sex and drinking.

At a recent meeting of the Gloucestershire diocesan anti-poverty group, the Rev. Roger Morris, a curate from the Cotswold village of Northleach, showed me a clipping from the *Gloucestershire Echo* about the phenomenon. It said:

"We take drugs because there is nothing else to do"

above the headline:

Youngsters' cry for help."

These are 14-year-olds in a very affluent village in Gloucestershire.

The after-school clubs will give them something to do and somewhere to go out of school hours. It will be a start. It will make a difference, offering opportunities for young people to learn, do homework, relax, mix, take up sports

[Mrs. Organ]

and games, and just do what they want to widen their experience and enrich their lives. The clubs will be available before and after school, at lunchtimes, weekends and holidays—those times when kids need something to do.

The lottery has been successful for the Forest of Dean. We have received £3.5 million—not the level of some constituencies that have received a lot more, but we have done well. I hope that the imbalance suffered by the Forest of Dean will be addressed through the improved strategic approach to distribution.

I should like to mention two projects in the Forest of Dean that have had an impact. The first is the gym at Coleford, which the Minister for Sport recently launched—he had an enjoyable evening, I understand. That £1 million project, principally funded by the lottery, gave us a magnificent centre of excellence for gymnastics and first-class provision for wider access throughout the community—for mums and toddlers, people doing yoga, fitness centres and people with learning difficulties learning to dance. A variety of people are using this lottery-funded activity. However, it is a building—the finance did not go to people. For the building to be effective in the long term, we need skilled coaches.

At the other end of the scale, there is a very small project of a few thousand pounds in a little hamlet in Brockweir—the Mackenzie hall. The project involved the replacement of the old floor to allow bowls to be played. That village hall is a vibrant centre of the community, offering opportunities for dance, amateur dramatics and a host of community events. The floor made a difference, but we won these projects only because determined people drove them through and because of a strong partnership involving organisations such as the local council, which provided the support to carry forward the application.

Many other ideas and projects in the Forest of Dean have not been so fortunate, and, due to the lack of expertise in the application—or because those involved were not so well connected—they have failed. Undoubtedly, the changes to the people's lottery in the Bill will benefit a wider group of people in rural areas such as the Forest of Dean. Particularly beneficial is the fast-track mechanism for the small grants scheme, and a simpler procedure for such schemes. There is renewed emphasis on more lottery money going to people and activities, rather than large-scale building projects. The Bill will deliver opportunities from lottery money, and it will make the lottery more effective. Money will be more widely disbursed and more strategically delivered. Communities such as the Forest of Dean will surely benefit from the reforms in the Bill and will welcome it, as I do.

6.22 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), to whom I apologise for my intervention. The look on the Secretary of State's face told me that I had misunderstood the situation, and I lay the blame on myself. I clearly misunderstood the figures in the Library briefing, and I will enter into private correspondence with the Secretary of State to clarify the matter.

Mr. Chris Smith: For the sake of courtesy to the right hon. Gentleman, I should say that the 90 per cent. figure runs right through all responses on all aspects of the Bill. Some among the 600 responded on different aspects of the Bill, but the 90 per cent. figure was consistent.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State, who has saved us a piece of mutual correspondence. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Forest of Dean, just as it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman). I personally approve of the measures that the Secretary of State has taken in the context of widening access to the lottery across the country. That was reflected in the speeches of both the hon. Members to whom I have referred.

I am grateful also to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) for drawing attention to the fact that some of the figures attributed to Westminster have a wider ambit. On the eve of the White Paper, I was sent figures about the distribution within my constituency. I picked up £55 million which clearly did not belong in the constituency at all—although I acknowledge that £50 million of that was for the Tate at Bankside, which could be regarded as an ambiguous case. Projects in four other parts of London—and seven in other parts of the country—were attributed to Westminster.

A little over five years ago, I had the privilege of moving the Second Reading of the National Lottery etc. Bill. I took 22 interventions in 59 minutes, and one of your predecessors in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, took any number of points of order. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) will remember the course of events. It was a detailed, but genial occasion—a good omen for the lottery itself.

Understandably, there was concentration on additionality, the arm's-length principle and the percentage distributions to good causes. At that stage, there were concerns—to which the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde referred—about the effect of the lottery on the pools, and its effect on charities.

We knew that the Millennium Commission's future demise—which was allowed for in the Bill—would afford an opportunity to revisit the percentages for good causes at some date in the future. I indicated that Parliament would have an opportunity in each Parliament—at least while my party was in power—to consider the percentages. If change was desired, there was a mechanism by order in the Bill to effect that change.

The first of those 22 interventions was—to his credit—from the present Minister for Sport, the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who asked me for assurances on the issue of additionality. He came back with a later intervention—he was among the 22—and was an enthusiastic contributor to the debate. As he did not repeat his first question, I can only assume that he received some reassurance from my answer.

I can only say that the lottery has been a success. I next revisited the subject as a Government Back Bencher, when the noble Lord Attenborough was good enough to invite me to what appeared to be a Labour party rally in

the Mansion house in my constituency—new Labour, new venues—at which the then Leader of the Opposition, the present Prime Minister, made a more enthusiastic speech about the arts and artists than he has so far managed in government. He removed several of the veils of NESTA on that occasion, as the Secretary of State may recall—I do not know whether he was there.

I have not compared the cast list of those who applauded the speech at that luncheon warmly with the cast list at the meeting on 24 March to discuss the opera house dilemma, when the reactions were also warm—but, on the whole, not in a direction favourable to the Government.

The Labour party manifesto indicated that the party would, if elected, create a new good cause to succeed the Millennium Commission when that lapsed. That pre-empted the opportunity to increase the amounts potentially available for charities which would have served to protect the arm's-length principle.

On 21 July last year—the day that the Secretary of State published the White Paper—I asked the Minister for Film and Tourism what his current definition of additionality was. I apologise for not having warned the right hon. Gentleman that I would say this, but I thought that he would be here. He replied, a little bizarrely:

"I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman is planning to contest the Glasgow, Govan constituency, or is he asking a question relevant to a Department he once headed? . . . I do not recall that he did much about it when he was in government. If the right hon. Gentleman manages to catch your eye when my right hon. Friend makes his statement, Madam Speaker, I am sure that he will not be disappointed."—[*Official Report*, 21 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 677.]

Whatever that answer meant, it was not an answer to the question I had asked. It occasioned me some presentiments of anxiety which were not relieved when the Secretary of State made his statement, by which, I fear, I was disappointed.

It was, I suppose, inevitable that the Secretary of State should that day have had the striking originality to call it "the people's lottery". I mentally promised myself to re-read "1984". Happily, the Secretary of State's shamelessness has not stretched to incorporating that tired phrase in the Bill, and I wholly applaud what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on that subject.

Fiona Mactaggart: The former Prime Minister.

Mr. Brooke: The former Prime Minister. Habits and loyalty die hard.

On additionality, the arm's-length principle and the 20 per cent. distributions, the news was universally bad. The opportunity for Parliament to debate the percentage distributions had not been taken, and the Millennium Commission's demise was not so much anticipated as disregarded. At Second Reading of the National Lottery etc. Bill, Labour Front-Bench Members had said that no more than 15 per cent. of national lottery revenues should be devoted to tax, but by Third Reading, at which the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde spoke from the Labour Front Bench—by which time the tax figure of 12 per cent. had been announced—the hon. Gentleman said that the 12 per cent. tax yield to the Treasury was far too high. I suppose that I should have regarded consistency as an unlikely element in the present Government's planning.

On 25 November 1997, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the cost of £300 million over five years to set up 30,000 new out-of-school clubs would be shared between the Exchequer and the New Opportunities Fund—words which the Secretary of State for Social Security echoed on 10 December 1997, speaking on the lone parents issue at the Report stage of the Social Security Bill. She prefaced that echo of the £300 million coming from the national lottery and the Exchequer with the words:

"the Government have made the biggest ever investment in child care."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 1087.]

Additionality seems difficult to identify in those words.

When I was in the Whips Office, I recognised that the price of a Back-Bench vote to take through a controversial European Union directive concerning heavy lorries might well be a constituency bypass, but at least on that occasion it was the Government's money that we were spending. When the present Government, confronted with a rebellion, played the child care card on the lone parents issue, a lot of the money was the lottery's, even if the Bill was not yet law.

The Bill was presented for First Reading in the Lords at the start of December 1997. My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), to a series of well-targeted questions, received a series of answers from Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Employment about current Government expenditure on projects that the lottery new good cause is scheduled to fund. I especially liked the answer by the Minister for Arts on 5 December 1997, that the budget of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport did spend money on librarian training, but that the sums involved were relatively small—the classic sad account of the parlour-maid's pregnancy.

On 18 December 1997, at Second Reading in the Lords, the Government's spokesman, Lord McIntosh of Haringey, spoke of the Libraries and Information Commission report, "New Library: The People's Network", which my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) mentioned, and prided himself on the Government's response to the request for a further £50 million.

I was reminded, especially by the words "The People's Network", of the principle of Danegeld. I remind the House of the account of Danegeld in "1066 and All That":

"Rather than wait for"

Ethelred the Unready,

"the Danes used to fine him large sums called Danegeld, for not being ready. But though they were always ready, the Danes had very bad memories and often used to forget that they had been paid the Danegeld and came back for it almost before they had sailed away."

For Ethelred the Unready—who was on the throne at the last millennium—read the Secretary of State; for the Danes, read spending Departments short of a bob or two.

All of that is said to be theology. In Liz Forgan's article in the *Evening Standard* on 17 December 1997, she asked:

"in what way is this spending on health, education and the environment different from the Government's normal spending on health, education and the environment? Send for a Jesuit."

But Treasury theology is usually erected as a Treasury defence against spending Departments. Here we have a spending Department conniving with the Treasury in the deployment of the theology.

I acknowledge that it needs to be emphasised that the Secretary of State's role is largely metaphysical. A wise man once said of ghosts that appearances are in their favour. I imagine that, in this instance, the Secretary of State will not wish to be quite so forthcoming.

[Mr. Brooke]

The percentages are a separate issue. When Labour was in power between 1929 and 1931, the British Government were offered what became the Aramco concession in Saudi Arabia for £20,000, provided that the money was paid in gold. Mr. Snowden, the present Chancellor's predecessor, declined the offer, on the ground that paying in gold would reflect adversely on sterling.

It was in that era that Calouste Gulbenkian earned his title of Mr. Five Per Cent. He knew that a constant percentage is a better long-term bet than an absolute sum, which is what the Secretary of State has decided that the existing distributors really wanted. The distributors have, of course, seen their percentages cut. I find it distasteful that the Government should imply that the distributors are not the losers.

I have narrated once before in the House the episode in the Brussels embassy when Ernest Bevin was Foreign Secretary and there was concern about whether he would be able to get through the doorway between the main spare bedroom and main spare bathroom in the embassy. A telegram was sent to the Foreign Office in London saying, "Please verify Secretary of State's diameter", to which the telex came back—those who know and love the Foreign Office are not surprised that it is more literate than numerate—"Unable to verify diameter, but circumference is 60 inches". For the Foreign Office not to understand geometry is perhaps forgivable; for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport not to understand arithmetic is less so.

These losses have struck distributors at exactly the moment when resources for the individual training of athletes are proving their worth; when the Arts Council cannot afford to sustain the highly important south bank centre's forward plans; and when the Budget's foreshadowing of changes to the access rules for works of art of museum quality retained under inheritance tax threatens that major works will flood on to the market—constituents have already advised me of that.

The present Lord Chief Justice, as a young barrister, when defending the Three Hands Disinfectant Company in a public health case, resisted the temptation of advancing the defence that this was a case where the first two hands did not know what the third hand was doing; but, at this juncture, the inheritance tax changes look like a case where the third hand did not know what the other two hands were up to.

I make a final comment on the penalties that the lottery operator may have to pay. I appreciate that the former director general asked for them; I do not oppose them, but I believe that they need to be clear. The Government were a little confusing and contradictory on that subject in the Lords. As a clarification, I found tautologous Lord McIntosh's reply to Lord Redesdale's amendment in Committee:

> "We believe that the sensible and reasonable application of the power to impose financial penalties is the most appropriate way of ensuring that any penalties imposed are fair."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 January 1998; Vol. 584, c. 9.]

I am reminded of the definition of an Act of God in Blackstone's law dictionary—an act that no reasonable man would expect God to commit.

I close with a verdict on the Bill, said in both sorrow and anger—to the latter of which I am not usually prone. It was described in the Lords as the thin end of the wedge. I think that it is the thick end, and I speak of its intellectual content. However, to go further down its road leading into public expenditure substitution is to be counter-productive in terms of popular support for the lottery.

In the run-up to the publication of the National Lottery etc. Bill in 1992, we said that, now that Albania had a lottery, we were the only country in Europe not to have one. Coming so late, we were able to create the best lottery in the world, and the former director general should have his own share of the credit for that. I am personally sad that the Bill takes us a small distance away from that pinnacle, and in an Albanian direction.

6.37 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am thrilled to be called to speak in this important debate. It is something of a transformation for me, because I was never a supporter of the national lottery; I was deeply worried about it. I was deeply worried that my local charities would find it difficult to raise money; I was deeply worried about regulation; and I was deeply worried for those who might bid and find themselves in difficulty later, unable to guarantee revenue for the projects for which they had received lottery funding.

I had many anxieties about the national lottery, but I am now standing here, in the House of Commons, saying that I was wrong. I was wrong to think that the lottery would not be part of our national ethos, and that we would not embrace it as we have. It is now very much part of the ethos, at least of my constituency. I am very pleased that we can see many of the things that I was concerned about being dealt with so efficiently and effectively.

I am involved with an important organisation in my constituency called Crawley Furni-aid, which delivers good-quality second-hand furniture to people who have very little. The organisation was struggling with a second-hand van and no premises, so we put our heads together and made an application for lottery funding. We received £140,000, which has totally transformed the organisation. We are now able to serve the people of Crawley efficiently and effectively. That is proof that the lottery is good for people.

The most exciting thing about the Bill is the New Opportunities Fund. I am thrilled to see that there will be information technology training for teachers and out-of-school clubs. As a nurse, I am most interested in the healthy living centres. They will certainly switch on people in Crawley to the fact that the Government are dealing with the issues that they have raised. I hope that we will not return to the silly, pedantic debate about additionality. Before and after the election, people have come to our surgeries and stopped Members of Parliament in the street to ask, "When will the Government allocate some lottery funding to education and health?" That is all that people are interested in, and the Government will ensure that it happens. I am very excited about that prospect.

It was claimed earlier that the schemes could be funded from elsewhere. How many healthy living centres did the previous Government establish? Those centres will play an important part in what it means to be an active citizen who makes good choices. Mention was made of people buying too many lottery tickets. Healthy living centres will promote a sense of well-being: they will encourage

people to make choices about health, money, and so on. They will make people feel better about themselves. People do not have to spend lots of money on lottery tickets to enjoy the benefits of the lottery. They should enjoy it for what it is: a bit of fun.

Mr. Green: I am fascinated by the hon. Lady's line of argument. If healthy living centres will discourage people from buying lottery tickets, the money will not be available to fund the healthy living centres. That is surely a paradox.

Laura Moffatt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention because it gives me an opportunity to ask him a question. Is he saying that it is okay to encourage people to buy lottery tickets when that is well beyond their means? I suspect that he is not. We are trying to say that the lottery should be good fun and that people should be able to afford and enjoy it. That is how we shall promote it.

I am a little sad to report that Crawley is in the bottom 80 both in terms of the cash amounts received and the number of bids. That is not because the people of Crawley are stupid or rich—and Opposition Members may laugh all they like—but because people want to be able to make their own bids. They want the proceeds of the lottery to come to them. It is not, as was claimed earlier, for Members of Parliament to ensure that all the bids are in. That is not how the system should operate. People should have the wherewithal and the ability to make lottery bids on their own, with the support and care of their Member of Parliament.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, as she referred to my intervention the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman). With respect, I think that she has misunderstood my point. As the hon. Gentleman said, when there is a shortage of support for bids, hon. Members from all parties can become involved—the hon. Lady gave an example of that earlier in her speech—and work with organisations in their constituencies.

Laura Moffatt: That is true: of course we must get involved. However, people should be able to make bids and feel that they have ownership of the lottery. If they need help and advice, they will receive it as a result of this legislation. We will ask what communities need. We will tell organisations how to make bids and how we shall assist them in that process. In that way, I believe that Crawley will be able to secure more lottery money for the town. I look forward to that day.

I must admit that I have never bought a lottery ticket—but, if I am honest, it is because I do not know how to fill out the form. Any assistance in that regard will be greatly appreciated. With the passage of the Bill, people will be able to feel secure and happy that the lottery now meets their needs.

6.44 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I took over as Secretary of State for National Heritage after my predecessors had done all the work. The initiative was proposed by the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), and three Secretaries of State were involved before I arrived at the Department. Like the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), I had some reservations about the national lottery. It was a time of scare stories and debate about whether we would become a nation of gamblers, whether the lottery would have an adverse effect and how the 540 millionaires created by the lottery would cope—would it be bad for their personalities or their health? Each week or month, there was another development and another wave of adverse comment.

The fact is that the national lottery has been the most extraordinary and spectacular success. I intervened, rather unkindly, on the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) in order to emphasise the enormity of the sums that have been generated for good causes. The Secretary of State crowed about giving the Arts Council an additional £5 million. It has received an additional £1 billion in the three-plus years that the lottery has existed. The figures are truly remarkable. Heritage has received almost £1 billion and the charities—the hon. Lady referred to Crawley Furni-aid in her constituency—have received additional spending of £750 million.

When individual projects are amassed, we can see the way in which the great flagship projects are bringing social and economic regeneration to rundown areas in cities such as Newcastle, Bristol, Leeds and Sheffield and to the South Bank. Cultural investment is often the focus of regeneration: it encourages jobs, promotes tourism and, most dramatically, turns around people's sense of pride in their regions. It has been the springboard for the present Government's references to "cool Britannia" with the massive expansion of, and investment in, the arts. The lottery has proved the most remarkable success.

Credit for that success must go not only to politicians—the former Prime Minister and my predecessors as Secretary of State—but to the distributing bodies which have worked relentlessly, remorselessly and tirelessly, some from a standing start, to get the distribution systems in place. I pay particular tribute to my noble Friend Lord Rothschild at the Heritage Lottery Fund, who has recently retired and will hand over to Eric Anderson. Following its early bumpy ride and the publicity surrounding the purchase of the Churchill papers, the heritage fund has developed strategies incorporating urban parks and countryside landscapes as well as the built heritage. About 225 museums so far have received help from the heritage fund, which has already moved into the development of access, education and the promotion of participation.

Hon. Members must take seriously the anxiety expressed by Lord Rothschild who, at the time of the preparation of the annual report, complained that the fund stands to lose £200 million from heritage resources under the Government's new proposals. The Arts Council said in the material that it issued before the debate that 70 per cent. of its capital awards had been for less than £100,000. Through its "Arts for Everyone" scheme, it has concentrated on young people, access and innovation.

Frankly, much of what the Secretary of State said today was an exercise in rebadging initiatives that are already well under way. The directions to lottery distributors that he announced had a familiar ring—if he had consulted the speeches of former Secretaries of State, he might have come across the phrases "people not buildings", "access for all", "children and young people" and "the use of volunteers". I do not begrudge rebadging of established

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

initiatives, but I think that he could have been more generous in attributing credit for the origin of some of his proposals, which are evolutionary—they build on what has gone before.

I also pay tribute to the Sports Council, which has allocated about £750 million. Of its projects, my favourite always used to be the bowls clubs—I understand from the Library that 305 bowls clubs have received lottery awards. The hon. Member for Crawley mentioned healthy living centres, but I often thought that bowls clubs were a very good substitute for them.

Alongside the great icons, bowls clubs are part of the tapestry of provision that builds communities and binds people together. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon said that he wanted fast bowlers, and I wish that he could have been with me last Saturday, when the village of Grayswood in my constituency celebrated receiving £12,500 from the Sports Council for its new cricket nets and scoreboards.

Such small projects have provided the sense of cohesion that is so important in people's lives—as work and families become more individualised and fragmented, stable societies need places in which people can congregate and activities in which they can participate. So often, it is the lottery which has provided such facilities.

I share the deep anxiety over some of the proposals. As I said, some are evolutionary. I welcome the establishment of a commission—that is a sensible next step—and the fact that distributing bodies will be encouraged to develop strategies. I also welcome the fact that more soliciting—as it is so delicately called—will be allowed. When I was Secretary of State, the law would allow one to coach applicants, but not to solicit them. The Secretary of State said that joint schemes would be encouraged—the wonderful arts scheme at Salford is one of many examples—to promote greater flexibility. All those are sensible, evolutionary steps.

It would be an enormously retrograde step, however, if the lottery became centralised and controlled by the Department. Envious eyes have looked menacingly at the lottery ever since it was established. Local authorities, for example, want to take it over and municipalise it. The Secretary of State must resist the temptation to take over and control the distributing bodies.

Like any Finance Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has found such a flow of money irresistible—he could not bear not to get his hands on it. During the last spending round when I was Secretary of State, the thumbscrews were applied and my nails were almost extracted from my fingers, but I did not succumb—I was not prepared to hand over the lottery to the Chancellor. My advice to the Secretary of State is that, once a precedent has been established, it is almost impossible to shut the door. The jackpot winner of the Bill is undoubtedly the Chancellor.

After such a massive raid on the funds, the Department will have to work extremely hard to restore its good name with the distributors. Given that the Secretary of State has deprived the funds of £200 million, it beggars belief that he should crow about a measly £2 million of Government money in relation to museum charges, along with £7 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and claim great credit for the £5 million for the arts—that is simply unsatisfactory.

I believe strongly that the Government should make it clear that the percentage share of the lottery proceeds for the different bodies will be safeguarded. The Bill represents a sad step in terms of the opportunities of those who were already investing in our heritage, arts and sport across the country. It is depressing beyond belief that the Government should disregard the detailed points that were raised in the House of Lords. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said, the Government have been helping themselves to the New Opportunities Fund before the Bill has even been enacted. The excessive control and interference, the means of approval and the introduction of new pet causes are all far from satisfactory.

When the Department of National Heritage—as it was—was established, the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon, said:

> "Man cannot live by GDP alone . . . A country can only be strong, healthy and contented if it burnishes its heritage, encourages its citizens to pursue excellence in sport and cultivates widespread appreciation of the arts. I set up the Department of National Heritage in that spirit. Its creation was a sign that Government should take such activities seriously—for millions of people, they are not optional extras, they are worth valuing in their own right."

As a result of the former Prime Minister's vision, a Department was established with precisely those issues at its heart—the national lottery was set up to provide the resources to make that vision possible. It will be a sad day if the results of the Bill are that the additionality principle is forgotten, the arm's-length arrangements are overlooked, the Chancellor is the beneficiary and the world's most successful lottery is nationalised.

6.57 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I follow the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) with pleasure. Although I agree that the lottery has been a success, I believe that it will be an even greater success as a result of the Bill—I do not share many of the concerns that she outlined.

I speak with some trepidation, however. Having heard two of my hon. Friends say that they have not bought lottery tickets, I must admit that I have, that I do and that I have won—[HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] I am more than happy to offer my advice on filling in the forms. The first time I won, I received £10, but the second time, I had four numbers right—I went with my younger daughter, who was acting as a kind of Securicor guard, to the shop to collect my winnings, which amounted to the princely sum of £43.

That probably qualifies me as a small-scale winner, but, more important, my constituency is also only a small-scale winner in the lottery stakes. There has been precious little fairness in the allocation of lottery grants to Blackpool, North and Fleetwood—whereas the Churchill papers were bought for £13 million, my constituents have received less than £1 million. Of the 659 United Kingdom constituencies, Blackpool, North and Fleetwood is ranked 620th. I thought that it would be bottom of the list until I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) said—his constituency is apparently even lower down the ranking order than we are. Like him, my

constituents and I want more, please, and I am attracted to the Bill because I believe it will allow more equitable distribution.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): The hon. Lady is discussing needs in her constituency. What is the likely impact on the confidence of her constituents of the Labour party withdrawing its conference from Blackpool?

Mrs. Humble: One of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues came to my constituency and announced that he had come to advise the good people of Blackpool, "as part of his tour of Yorkshire and the north-east." If Conservative Members cannot even get their geography right, they cannot advise me on the Labour party conference or any other matter.

Although I am concerned about the poor allocation to my constituency, the awards that we have had have been valuable and well received. One was to develop a money advice unit at the Wyre District citizens advice bureau in Cleveleys. I have visited it and seen the vital work that it does in offering support and advice to people in debt and from disadvantaged neighbourhoods—indeed, it has prevented people from getting into far worse problems, by reordering their debts and negotiating with banks and utilities. It has been able to provide an essential service for so many people only because of a lottery grant.

A second lottery grant awarded in August was for an all-weather pitch at Blackpool and The Fylde college, which is an excellent example of partnership—in this case, between the college, Blackpool council and local youth football clubs. The pitch is used by students in college term time and by the community at weekends and outside term time. It is the only facility of its kind in Blackpool, North. Those are just two excellent examples of lottery funding. Seeing those examples makes my constituents want a much fairer allocation of the substantial resources available for distribution.

I especially support the fast-track mechanism for small community grants. Local people and groups will have far more opportunities to work together to cut through the bureaucracy and to access those grants. I therefore welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that those allocations will be re-examined to ensure that the constituencies that are at the bottom of the pile get more.

The New Opportunities Fund is an exciting initiative. My hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), who has now left the Chamber, drew attention to the special needs of rural areas. However, everything that she said about young people in rural areas applies equally to those in urban areas. Schemes that help children are vital wherever the children live. As education is the Government's priority, the Bill recognises that out-of-school-hours activities are an important ingredient of a child's overall education. The range of possibilities is enormous. Many of the children whom I represent go back to crowded homes where, because they cannot do their homework, their educational achievement is damaged. A simple measure such as providing a quiet room for children to do their homework can be of enormous educational benefit. Complementary learning activities may include drama, sport or multi-media activities. I cannot even switch on a computer, so I am always surprised at schoolchildren's competence. Many after-school-hours clubs build on the education that children receive during the day.

When we discuss child care, some of us forget that, while it is fairly easy for parents to organise child care for pre-school children—it may be expensive, but parents can organise their day—once children start school, parents encounter the problem of who will take them to school and pick them up when school finishes. After-school clubs provide vital support for many parents, some of whom have to give up jobs because they cannot organise their working time around school hours. Although many schemes provide examples of good practice, I welcome the proposals in the Bill to solicit applications. Many organisations that run such schemes are either reluctant to apply for lottery funding or are unaware of the different aspects of lottery funding available to them. I hope that more funding will be available to them in the future.

Through my personal links with the Lancashire Area West association of out-of-school clubs, I know the excellent work that such organisations do, and that they look forward to an expansion of the current provision. Although I welcome that aspect of the Bill, I urge the Minister to ensure that child care providers receive on-going support, training, advice and guidance. Networks such as the Lancashire Area West association provide support, but it is vital to ensure that good practice continues and that provision is of a high quality, because everyone agrees that that is vital for young children.

I am also concerned about provision for children with special needs. An increasing amount of special needs education now takes place in mainstream schools. If we are to expand out-of-school-hours provision for mainstream schools, we must consider the problems of special needs children within those schools.

I welcome the Bill, especially the proposals for fairer distribution. I hope that Blackpool, North and Fleetwood will jump up the rankings and that all the good causes covered by the New Opportunities Fund will contribute to important local initiatives and meet the people's priorities.

7.6 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Unlike some Labour Members, I have played the lottery, but not very often. When I first started playing it, I was convinced that I would win—we all were, to start with—but now I play only on roll-over days, and even my children have stopped nagging me to buy tickets.

Despite the fact that some of us have become bored with it over time, the lottery has been a huge commercial success. An astonishing 30 million people—65 per cent. of all adults—play the lottery each week and spend on average only £3. Independent research has confirmed that our lottery is the most efficient in the world and returns the highest percentage to the Government and good causes. By 2001, some £10 billion will have been raised for good causes, which is a remarkable record by any standard, particularly given the misgivings that many of us had when the lottery was first put in place several years ago.

The lottery was designed to revitalise and stimulate capital investment in many unfashionable areas. In my constituency, many small local charities have benefited and small projects throughout Norfolk have received funding. Examples from my constituency include a new football pavilion at Wells and the extension of a rugby club. Such projects would never have received support from central Government. Norfolk youth music theatre put on "The

[Mr. David Prior]

Hunchback of Notre Dame" and "The Wind in the Willows". I am thinking, too, of the £300,000 grant to restore the Hickling broad for wildlife purposes; the Fakenham children's day care centre; and a small foundation in north Norfolk for the mentally ill. None of those projects would have attracted central Government funding. That is the essence of what we mean by additionality. These are the projects that will always get squeezed out by the high-spending Government Departments.

There has always been disagreement about exactly how the money should be spent and on what project—it would take the Archangel Gabriel to secure agreement from all parties—but there have been two key underlying principles: first, that the money should be spent by people independent of the Government; and, secondly, that the money should be spent on projects that would not otherwise be financed from taxation.

There was an exchange between my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and the Secretary of State about clause 12. We should make it clear in *Hansard* that clause 12 gives the Secretary of State far more control over the distributing bodies. He has the power to instruct them to prepare and adopt a strategic plan, and it must be such

"as to demonstrate how the body is taking into account or, as the case may be, complying with the directions mentioned in subsection (3)(a)",

which refers to

"a statement of any directions given to the body by the Secretary of State".

So it is quite clear that the Secretary of State's powers over the distributing bodies will be much greater in future.

Mr. Levitt: Has the hon. Gentleman also read clause 12(5)(d), which says that

"after consultation with the Secretary of State,"

the award-giving body shall

"make such modifications to the draft as it"—

not the Secretary of State—

"considers necessary or expedient."?

Mr. Prior: There is clearly some conflict between clause 12 and subsection (5)(d), and that is something we shall no doubt discuss in Committee.

As my right hon. Friend pointed out, clause 18 states quite clearly that the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

"may not spend their endowment, or any part of their endowment, without the approval of the Secretary of State."

It is quite clear to me that, in future, the money raised for good causes will not be as independent of Government as in the past, and that is a great pity. I very much hope that we in this country will not descend into the pork barrel politics into which other countries have descended, and that various Government Ministers will not compete with each other to spend the money from the "people's lottery".

On the second principle—that money should be spent on projects that would not otherwise be financed by taxation—the Prime Minister put it unequivocally when he said:

"we don't believe it would be right for the Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibility".

That is precisely what the Bill proceeds to do.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the former Prime Minister, who said that Conservative Members are not Luddites. We are not saying that there are no changes that could be made. It would be amazing if there were none—after all, the lottery is an entirely new concept for this country. I am sure that we shall be open to changes to the regulatory regime. We shall certainly be open to switching some of the money away from capital to revenue spending.

There are a number of issues that should be looked at. What is the evidence that under-16s are buying lottery tickets, and what more could be done to stop them? Is there any evidence that certain people are becoming addicted to buying scratchcards? Is there any evidence that charities have been hit particularly hard as a result of the lottery? There have been questions about the large capital donations that have been given to big projects, and about the regulatory regime. Opposition Members would have been quite happy to address some of those questions.

In whatever way the Government wish to portray them, the new opportunities set out in the Bill—education, health and the environment—are at the centre of traditional Government spending. They cannot, by any definition, be seen to be additional. Many of them are worthy projects. They include out-of-school initiatives, child care centres and healthy living centres. We are not arguing about the worth of such projects; we are arguing that they should not be financed from the lottery.

The Government appear so eager to raise the money that on 14 October they started to set money aside for the new causes. That strikes many Opposition Members as outrageous. Had the Government wished to be honest about it, they could have delayed setting aside money and brought in a higher percentage to be paid to the new causes. That would at least have had the merit of being transparent. Instead, they are effectively ratifying an action retrospectively, which is not something that hon. Members would in general support.

The Government have rebranded the lottery as the "people's lottery". I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon that people are becoming to sick to death of the term, "the people's", which is used to stifle debate. Our lottery is clearly now a Government lottery, to be spent on the Government's priorities, on projects that should properly be financed by tax receipts that are raised and allocated democratically.

7.16 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): My Welsh nonconformist background has, I fear, inhibited me from taking advantage of the lottery on many occasions—that, coupled with the fact that I have never won anything on the lottery. Although I have never won anything, I well understand the sense of elation that comes from winning it, having won an allegedly safe seat from the Conservatives last year.

I am delighted to support the Bill, which will undoubtedly refocus the national lottery, improving both its regulation and distribution arrangements, but,

most important, ensuring that the lottery funds a wider range of good causes. I will take no lessons from Conservative Members about ducking and not using the phrase, so, in short, the Bill will complete the process of turning the national lottery into truly the people's lottery.

The lottery has been a remarkable success, generating considerable sums for a number of important projects. In my borough, these range from the refurbishment and redevelopment of a heavily used leisure centre to the funding of a scheme to help disabled people to access work placements. I look forward to an early announcement on the much-delayed outcome of a heritage lottery fund bid for Headstone manor in my constituency.

Mr. Lansley: If the hon. Gentleman is so keen on reflecting the priorities of the players of the lottery in the distribution of good causes money, has he contemplated the proposal, of which I am sure he is aware, that players should be able to mark a lottery ticket to indicate to what purpose they wish the money to be given?

Mr. Thomas: Lottery players indicated all too well at the last general election that they supported the priorities of the Labour party for the lottery. That scheme is fine.

Mr. Fraser: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: I should like to move on.

There is a growing body of evidence, outlined by many of my hon. Friends, that the distribution of awards is seriously skewed not just by region but in terms of project size. The concentration is on bricks and buildings, as opposed to people and activities. The lack of clear and explicit distribution strategies has generated considerable frustration and concern.

There is also widespread support for our commitment to creating the New Opportunities Fund. As I said earlier, increasing the number of activities funded by the lottery will more accurately reflect the priorities of all who buy tickets. The New Opportunities Fund is probably the most exciting aspect of this excellent Bill, creating a sixth good cause—health, education and the environment—to be financed from the extra £1 billion that the lottery will generate over and above original expectations, and enjoying the overwhelming support of the British public. Following the publication of the White Paper, 91 per cent. of respondents said that they were in favour of the fund.

Mr. Spring: How many of those responses came from members of the public, as opposed to organisations?

Mr. Thomas: Most of the organisations that responded represented a considerable number of individuals. I realise that it is difficult for Conservative Members to recognise the support that the New Opportunities Fund is receiving, but I urge them to join the mainstream on this issue at least.

More than half the 91 per cent. argued that the fund would act as a natural and obvious extension of the existing good causes, helping to deal with charges of imbalance and concern about the exclusion of health and education issues. In retrospect, it appears perverse that those issues were originally excluded. I do not think anyone has suggested that the first three initiatives announced by the Government under the auspices of the New Opportunities Fund will not be of considerable benefit to the country. Opposition Members have tried to argue that they somehow violate the additionality principle, but they clearly do not.

There is no doubt that the Government have considerable health, education and environment responsibilities, along with considerable arts, heritage and sport responsibilities. There is also no doubt that, within those areas, substantial areas of expenditure are core responsibilities of Government, to be publicly funded. But there will always be more that we would like to do, which the taxpayer cannot afford. That means desirable, as opposed to critical, expenditure, building on existing core expenditure. The three initial initiatives clearly fit into that category.

Healthy living centres have been variously described as the national lottery's first big idea, as long overdue and as a brilliant concept. I share that enthusiasm. Numerous reports have made it clear that there is a link between areas of deprivation and greater ill health, and it is nothing short of a scandal that the previous Government refused to acknowledge that link or to do anything about it.

Healthy living centres provide a powerful opportunity to improve the health of people of all ages, complementing existing services and reaching out to those who have been deprived of opportunities for better health. They will stimulate a range of additional services dealing with, for instance, stress management, healthy eating and drug and alcohol recovery, side by side with mainstream services and providing advice, self-help groups and opportunities for physical activity. Healthy living centres are an inspired choice for a share of the first tranche of money from the New Opportunities Fund, and I am not surprised that more than 96 per cent. of respondents supported them.

I especially welcome the commitment that, while there will be quality standards, there will be no central blueprint for projects. Healthy living centre schemes should come from within a community. They should be put together by those who will use the services—by the social entrepreneurs who exist in many communities, whose ideas have been ignored too often in the past by bureaucracies and professionals who believed that they knew best.

Healthy living centres must be high-class holistic partnerships, involving health professions and the local community, delivering services—perhaps with education and sporting bodies—in new and innovative ways. Their philosophy should encourage people to take responsibility for their personal physical and mental well-being.

There are already isolated examples of services that could provide models for healthy living centres. Later this month, the Peckham Pulse centre will open—an initiative bringing together the local community, some health services and some sporting facilities in a single high-quality modern centre. New sporting facilities will be "moulded in" with high-quality consulting rooms, a cafe, a fully staffed children's play area and meeting rooms for the local community.

The centre will bring together sport and health in a way that will not be off-putting, catering for those who—like many of us present tonight—may not yet be high-class performance athletes, and delivering improvements in the health of all people, whatever their capacity, and however fit they are.

[Mr. Thomas]

I pay tribute to all those involved in the Bromley-by-Bow centre in Tower Hamlets, which I was privileged to visit recently. Creative arts projects and football teams stand side by side with community care projects and a community cafe. They are fully integrated with a health care centre and numerous religious organisations, not to mention an environmental project that is transforming the previously dilapidated local park. It is run by the community, pulling together statutory and non-statutory services. It was provided because the community wanted those services, and it is transforming the expectations of young and old alike.

The funding for out-of-hours schools-based activity is also welcome, as some of my hon. Friends have said. In my constituency, only a few schools have been able to establish some effective after-school provision so far. Pinner Wood first and middle schools in the north and Welldon Park first and middle schools in the south provide excellent out-of-school clubs, offering a wide range of activities to diverse groups of pupils. The Pinner Wood club has been so successful that it now has a growing waiting list. Welldon Park's list is also growing, and I was delighted to attend its very successful end-of-term entertainment last week.

I emphasise, however, that those two clubs are isolated examples. Many other schools and parents look on enviously. After-school clubs offer an excellent opportunity to combine child care with further education and play opportunities, enhancing children's social, intellectual and emotional development. They, too, are highly desirable projects, complementary to the core education provision in schools. The start-up money from the New Opportunities Fund will help to spread the excellent practice that exists in clubs such as those in my constituency.

Another interesting and welcome aspect of the Bill is the establishment of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. One of the successes of the lottery to date has been the lottery sports fund's championing and funding of our own world-class performance athletes. We need a similar fund that can champion the talented in the creative, scientific and technological worlds. It is little short of a scandal that, partly because of the absence of such a fund, other countries have had to step in to develop into commercially successful projects the ideas, inventions and new products of our science community.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman is explaining the essential character of the various projects that the Government propose to fund from the lottery. If they are so integral to the performance of their respective tasks, why does the hon. Gentleman conclude that the Government considered it wrong for them to be funded by taxpayers' money? Why did the Government not think that they were so valuable that they should be financed by mainstream programmes?

Mr. Thomas: With respect, it is a bit rich to be asked that question by a Conservative Member. The Conservative party claims that such provision is core provision. Why have three quarters of pupils in my constituency no access to after-school clubs? I accept that that is partly due to the incompetence of the Liberal Democrats who currently run the council, but I fear that it is mostly due to the fact that the Conservative party never demonstrated any intention of funding such clubs. The funding, therefore, is clearly additional.

The White Paper refers to the high quality of our scientists, but our continuing inability to translate their talent into business ideas is a powerful raison d'etre for NESTA.

I also welcome the changes in practice for existing distributors. The ability for distributors to lay down clear strategies based on need and to set out how they intend to distribute funds will enable more efficient use of lottery funds to develop initiatives where they are needed and where they will be of most benefit.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a distribution problem, not for inner-city areas or leafy suburbs, but for peripheral urban areas, such as his constituency and mine? For 18 years, such areas were neglected by central Government funding, and neglected in the allocation of awards, sometimes because of a lack of applications. Does he also agree that there is a need for capacity building in such communities to elicit applications, and for special concentration on peripheral areas?

Mr. Thomas: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I welcome the requirement for distributor boards to prepare strategies so that they can focus on and address the needs of peripheral areas.

The ability of lottery distributors to solicit applications to support their strategic aims is a sensible innovation. It will help to ensure that lobbying by the new army of lottery consultants does not mean that only the loudest, largest and most articulate groups win funding.

We must refocus lottery distributors so that their structures are more effectively in contact with local communities, and so that decisions can be taken more quickly, feedback and advice can be given more effectively and people and activity can be concentrated on, rather than bricks and mortar.

Small sporting clubs do not need new club houses; they need access to good coaches or small amounts of crucial equipment. The Bill will allow distributors to provide vouchers, which might help clubs and community groups to develop the talents and skills of leaders, be they coaches or scout leaders, and, in turn, enable them to develop the skills and talents of club members.

There is widespread public support for changes in the lottery. The public want a more equitable distribution of lottery funds. At present, there are serious disparities in funding, by locality and by size and type of project. Health, education and the environment have been excluded for no logical reason, when they are what the people of Britain care about most passionately.

The lottery has been a tremendous success, but its flaws are readily apparent, and are already beginning to detract from its popularity. The Bill will put the national lottery firmly back on track. It will improve the distribution, regulation and direction of lottery funding, and ensure that it is in tune with the people's priorities. I warmly welcome it.

7.32 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I suppose that someone has to say it: I dislike the national lottery. It puts decisions about public money into unelected hands, and introduces a random hand in expenditure, which is unaccountable—within limits: if an allocation of funds in not particularly popular, Ministers have nothing to do with it; if an announcement is popular, Ministers are always in the photograph.

I should much prefer no lottery at all. It was originally argued that we had to have our own state lottery because other gambling and other state lotteries would come into the United Kingdom and take British money if we did not. I was unpersuaded by that argument, and still feel distaste for the British Government's sponsorship of a lottery, which lowers the tone of government by putting the authority of the state behind the concept of gambling.

And gambling it is: 30 million people a week—two thirds of households—take part. My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) referred to an average bet of £3, but £5 or £6 per household per week goes into this vast money machine, which gives gamblers a negligible chance of winning.

In December 1992, the Secretary of State for National Heritage said:

"The lottery will not attract the gambler. We expect it to attract a new section of the population, people who are willing to have a flutter knowing that—win or lose—money will be going to good causes."

Some flutter: £15,000 million is spent, often by people who can ill afford £5 or £6 a week per household. It saddens me that the turnover in lottery tickets is busiest in the most deprived areas. Self-evidently, people hope for a miracle to escape financial disadvantage—it is tax by another name.

The profile of those who pay shows an emphasis on those with lower incomes and capital, and the analysis of those who benefit shows a heavy slant to the more privileged. The lottery is redistributive, and I regret that.

I should have preferred the Government to have the courage years ago to decide on good causes, to find the money, and to come to the House of Commons to explain what major projects they proposed to support. Projects such as the magnificent one at the Louvre in France deserve support, but I should prefer hon. Members to debate them in the House.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) referred to the development of the new and burdensome industry of advisers and consultants, who assist local authorities and others to make lottery bids. Applicants are encouraged to shape their bid to make it more attractive to those who might provide the money, and advisers even encourage institutions to reorganise and restructure, so that they are more likely to be an acceptable bidder. Many bidders spend good money to reshape themselves, and that dead money is of value to no one.

If we are to have a lottery, how should it be structured? The 1978 royal commission defined worthy causes as those which

"however desirable, would not ordinarily be financed by Government"

because

"they would distort the priorities the Government had set itself."

The commentator, Sir Robin Day, said that the idea was worthy because it would support projects that would

"bridge the gap between public funds and private philanthropy in those many areas of national life where additional expenditure may be described as desirable but not essential."

My noble Friend Lord Baker, when Home Secretary, said of the money from the lottery:

"I must emphasise that this will be additional funding. The Government do not intend that the money provided by the lottery should substitute for existing expenditure programmes."

Following those principles, I cannot imagine a better cause than the Millennium Commission's sponsorship of the plan to redevelop the entrance to Portsmouth harbour and the Gosport area in my constituency. One does not have to stuff presents from Father Christmas back up the chimney because one does not believe in him. The plan is imaginative; it is a sweeping vision, with promenades for Gosport and for Portsmouth, new open and leisure areas and spectacular water features, which will be dominated by a tall, elegant tower reminiscent of a sailing spinnaker.

The planning stage has gone through, and building work will proceed later in the year. This £86 million project has £40 million of support from the lottery. I should have much preferred it to come out of public funds rather than lottery funds, but the project is exactly in accordance with the original test of additionality.

What is planned under the Bill? The siphoning off of £1 billion, which is in excess of the original expected lottery yield of £9 billion, has been justified by the Prime Minister, who said:

"It is the people's lottery. It should address the people's priorities."

On message as always, the Secretary of State for Social Security said:

"It is the public's money, and the public want it spent on high-quality child care."

I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who attacked the "people's this, people's that" attitude; an increasing number of people find such extraordinarily cheap populism offensive.

The Government propose the New Opportunities Fund and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, and they will spend the money as they think fit. They are also tightening their grip on every aspect of expenditure of lottery funds. Clause 12 provides that the Secretary of State will give instructions about a strategic plan, which must be submitted to the Secretary of State for consultation, after which a body must

"make such modifications to the draft as it considers necessary or expedient."

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said, the Secretary of State will tighten his control over the distribution of lottery funds. The Secretary of State will discover that, in the annual bilateral meetings with the Treasury, it in turn will tighten its control over him. The Treasury will lean on him, and, as always, it will win. The lottery will become a voluntary tax paid substantially by poorer people, and promoted by the Government as a game. I find that very sad.

7.40 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): There seems to be general agreement that the projected £9 billion of lottery income could be £10 billion, and there is even speculation

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

that the figure will be higher. I hope that my colleagues on the Front Bench will not be too perturbed, and will not get their statisticians to recalculate their projection when they discover that I am yet another hon. Member who has never bought a lottery ticket in his life. I am £176 better off than anyone who has bought one ticket a week. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) said that she has won more than £50 on the lottery. If she had bought a ticket a week, she would now be £120 out of pocket.

By not paying that £176, I have deprived the good causes of only £40 over the three and a bit years that the lottery has been in operation. That would have been spread among all the different good causes in the lottery structure. I am not being sanctimonious when I say that I have given considerably more than £40 to good causes in that period, with the added advantage that, for every pound I have given, the good cause has had £1-worth of benefit.

I had some gut sympathy with the arguments of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), but they were the arguments of four years ago. They were pertinent to the establishment of the lottery, but not to the position now. The lottery is well established, and is undoubtedly successful by any measure. We must move forward, and no one except the hon. Gentleman seriously wants to go back four years to a time when we did not have a lottery.

I noted that the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) said that being a millionaire can damage one's health. Perhaps she was referring to some of her hon. Friends.

The arguments of the hon. Member for Gosport tell us something about the way in which the lottery is operated. Concerns have been expressed about under-age gambling, the promotion of gambling, the size of the profits made by Camelot and the size of its directors' pay packets, and the damage that may have been done to charitable giving. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said that the Football Trust had lost about 60 per cent. of its funding, although it may now have got that back. Many other charities will have got their funding back, but some will not, and we must give them consideration.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman referred to concerns about the pay of the people at Camelot who run the lottery. Does he subscribe to those concerns, and, if so, why? The good causes do not lose, regardless of the level of their pay. The Treasury does not lose any duty, and the players do not lose on prizes. The pay of its directors is a matter between Camelot and its shareholders.

Mr. Levitt: That was not the view of the previous Government when the Greenbury committee reported on excessive salaries. They should have heeded its recommendations.

There are also concerns about the size of the payouts. The huge roll-over figures suggest that there is some scope for putting limits on prizes. The highest payouts could be reduced without lessening the attraction of the lottery to those who participate, and the money could be used to supplement the donations to good causes.

We shall deal with those problems, and we shall continue to ensure that the lottery is run according to the highest ethical standards. Those who have received lottery funding in the past three years have felt the benefit. The Bill provides massive potential benefit from the new funds and from the existing good causes.

I am one of the vice-chairs of the all-party group on the voluntary sector. It has met leaders of the National Lottery Charities Board and has discussed funding from the lottery as it affects the voluntary sector and charities. The group has made submissions as part of the consultation process.

During the year before I entered the House, I took soundings from the voluntary sector and charities in my High Peak constituency about how they operate, what problems they have and how they could be best addressed. Funding from the lottery loomed large in their calculations. They were concerned that only 6p in every pound given to the lottery was going to each good cause. They were particularly concerned that there should be transparency in funding decisions. They wanted decision making to be decentralised, and judgments on funding to be made by their peers rather than by faceless bureaucrats on high. The strategic planning required by the Bill will provide opportunities for greater transparency and decentralisation.

I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) about the comparative lack of success of bids from rural areas. Although we have had some successes in my constituency, the Peak District rural deprivation forum, which is a worthy cause, has had three bids rejected. Organisations that fail to win lottery funds should be given feedback, so that it is easier for them to submit future bids. I understand that that provision, not hitherto available, is anticipated in the Bill, and that is very welcome.

I want to raise the issue of co-ordination between different bids made to different good causes that involve a particular project. The Buxton opera house in my constituency is looking for both heritage and arts funding. Theatre projects have to be planned well in advance, because the theatre may have to close, and may not be able to put on performances. Changes to disabled access need to be made without disturbance to audiences. Co-ordination between the different funding bodies has proved difficult, and the original timetable has not been followed. The evidence suggests that co-ordination between the funding bodies needs to be better.

Another subject raised by the voluntary sector organisations, especially the small bodies, was the huge amount of time and effort required to construct a bid. Some organisations almost cease to do the job that they were set up to do because one or two employees or those who are at the heart of the organisations spend their time putting a bid together, rather than getting on with their work. I hope that that problem can be addressed.

The Government have already made some changes, and there have been local initiatives to assist organisations that are seeking grants. In my area, High Peak borough council and Derbyshire county council have designated officers to advise organisations on the putting together of bids. In addition to assistance, they provide an assessment of possible success and application forms. Derbyshire council was strapped for cash a couple of years ago, but it was able to place a substantial sum in an account to support organisations with matched funding.

The gearing of some elements of lottery funding is such that, if there is no core funding, there can be no matched funding. However, a small contribution from another

source, such as a local authority, can enable a bid to attract considerable matched funding and allow a project to go ahead. That is a good use of public funds, and it allows more investment in the services that people require. It has proved successful, and it highlights a problem that hon. Members have mentioned. It is that many areas have low lottery funding because they had difficulty putting together matched funding to make a bid. Matched funding ensures a greater chance of success.

I am pleased to see the abolition of the minimum grant, and I welcome the practice that started in January of permitting open-ended bid periods, so that organisations can make bids when they are ready, rather than having to abide by an imposed, artificial and arbitrary timetable.

I should like to deal with two issues that were raised by Opposition Members. I mentioned one of them in my intervention on the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), when I spoke about additionality, a concept which is easier to understand when viewed in terms of substitution. I gave as an example the funding that will be provided to train teachers on information technology for the new millennium. There is a world of difference between substitute funding for day-to-day, in-service or pre-service training, and training on information technology. Substitution in the former case would replace Government and local authority provision.

Information technology provides new opportunities for schools, and the national lottery may grant funds for investment in the internet and in the hardware that is required to access it. A huge one-off investment in training teachers over a short time in addition to the ordinary requirements of teacher training is not substitution: it is additionality.

There is an alternative to such funding, but local authorities find it difficult to take on big, one-off, new commitments. In any case, it would not be possible through the current local authority funding process, even if we wished to do it that way, for local authorities to spend large amounts on the training of teachers in high-technology skills. In such situations, one-off, intensive lottery funding is justified.

The second issue is strategic planning. Clause 12 puts into effect what the Secretary of State has said. I noted what he said. He said that he was issuing letters today on new directions for funding that would take it away from the capital and revenue debate and towards social value, people, access, children and young people. It will be a move towards a fairer geographical spread, and will include in-kind funding and sustainable development.

Those are the criteria which my right hon. Friend has set, and it is right that strategic planning should relate to them. The funding bodies will be told, "Here are the criteria for funding. How do you plan to meet them?" That is certainly not political intervention in individual lottery bids. It changes the direction of the framework along the lines that we have made plain all along.

As I have said, the results of the lottery so far are worth celebrating, and there will be a great deal more to celebrate in future. I welcome the fact that the first sod was turned last week on the Tideswell sports centre, which is a £1 million investment in a Derbyshire village. The Pavilion gardens in Buxton are well on the way to being refurbished, and the lake will be revitalised. Some brass bands in my constituency have received new funding. They include the Fairfield brass band, of which I have the honour to be an honorary vice-president.

Like the case quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), a furniture project in my constituency has had lottery funding. It did not receive as much as the one in her constituency, but it supports a valuable new initiative, which not only recycles furniture and passes it to people who need it, but provides many training opportunities. Funding for Glossop women's aid and the award of another couple of winning bids were announced last week, and they are welcome.

Buxton is an historic town, and we shall seek heritage funding for three of its local buildings—the opera house, the Crescent and the former Devonshire royal hospital. Those are magnificent buildings with a high architectural value, but perhaps the more important aspect of the funding is that it will be for what happens in the buildings. The hospital will become vacant in the middle of next year, and we seek a sensitive and publicly accessible use for it. If anyone has any good ideas, I should be pleased to hear them. It has the largest existing dome in the country.

I applaud the Bill, and not just for the reasons that I have given. Hon. Members have spoken about NESTA and the New Opportunities Fund, and about the commitment, repeated time and again in the consultation documents, that there will be no substitution. We are debating additional funding.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Does my hon. Friend welcome as I do the comments by the former Cabinet Minister William Waldegrave that were published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23 March? He described NESTA as a welcome, imaginative and wise project. Does my hon. Friend further agree that that contrasts markedly with the grudging and mealy-mouthed attitude of Opposition Members, and that, just as electoral defeat has improved William Waldegrave's attitude, a period of defeat might improve the attitude of Conservative Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman should not make another speech.

Mr. Levitt: I shall merely say that it looks as though the wrong half of the Conservative party failed to get re-elected last year. My hon. Friend cites the good example of NESTA in connection with additionality—if it is so important for the Government to get involved, why did not the previous Government do so?

I look forward to the Bill's unhampered passage through the House, and its rapid evolution into the establishment—yes, I use the phrase again—of a true people's lottery, which is what we intend to have.

7.59 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) and I share a common interest in sport, although I do not agree with some of what he has just said. We have both been trying to get ready for the coming cricket season and, although we are not trying to be the first-class athletes whom the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) was talking about, I hope that we have some profitable and hard-hitting partnerships when the season gets under way.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

The hon. Member for High Peak may not have realised that he was on dangerous ground when he referred to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) and her comments about millionaires. Perhaps he did not realise how much hilarity he caused us—

Fiona Mactaggart: I am sorry to intervene, but I watched the hilarity, and I have to say that it is very irritating when the only thing to which Conservative Members will respond is the amount of money with which one is born. Since I was elected to the House, there are two matters on which I have been lobbied by the sort of people among whom I was born and brought up—one is the defence of their right to hunt furry foxes, and the other is the defence of their right to be overpaid consultants to bodies that have been milking the lottery until now, but which will not be able to do so in future.

Mr. Hawkins: The extraordinary thing is that I had not mentioned the hon. Lady. On another occasion, she might wait until she has been mentioned before she intervenes; it really is a case of:

"The lady protests too much, methinks."

I shall look back for a moment to the time when my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), the former Secretary of State for National Heritage, moved the Second Reading of the National Lottery etc. Bill just over five years ago. Reading *Hansard* from that period is particularly instructive.

Perhaps the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons might like to reflect on the importance of revisiting subjects about five years after they first come up, because one of the most fascinating things about that Second Reading debate was that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster had been on his feet for only a few minutes, the first intervention that he took was from the Minister for Sport, who was then the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. The hon. Gentleman asked:

"What assurances can the Secretary of State give the House that the money from a national lottery, if one is instituted, will not be used to replace central Government funding for a number of the areas that he has designated? If the Government no longer publish their forward plans for funding the arts, how can we ever know whether they have taken the national lottery money into consideration when making a settlement for the arts and other areas?"—[*Official Report*, 25 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 715.]

I am tempted to say that the Minister was then just a humble and radical Back Bencher, but, after further consideration, I have to say that he was never that humble, although he was absolutely right to say what he did. His long experience of this place had made him aware of the rapacity of the Treasury, and he raised the very concerns about additionality that we have raised again tonight.

If hon. Members look back to that debate in 1993 and to the entire Committee proceedings, they will find that hon. Member after hon. Member from what was then the Opposition was pressing the Government about additionality and its sacrosanct nature. The vast majority of those Labour Members are now either Ministers or Whips, apart from the then hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton who, sadly, could not find a Labour seat to fight.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for piloting the original Bill through its Committee stage. He was in the Chamber earlier today, and I know that he has taken a great interest in these proceedings. I add my recognition of the work that he did to the tributes that have already been paid to my right hon. Friends the Members for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), for Cities of London and Westminster and for South-West Surrey.

The fact that the Government are undermining the principle of additionality in the Bill is of particular concern to the distributive bodies. My particular concern, as the Minister well knows, is about sport. At this stage, I must apologise to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for the fact that, because of a long-standing commitment to constituents, I shall not be here for all the winding-up speeches, although I hope to hear some of them and will certainly read them with great care in *Hansard*.

The Minister will be aware that the English Sports Council has expressed particular concern about the proposals. It said that it was important that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport recognised that the new commitment—the New Opportunities Fund—would impact on the English Sports Council by reducing the percentage share allotted to sport. It went on to say that although the White Paper confirmed that the existing good causes would receive the same amount as envisaged when the lottery was originally established, it would none the less result in an estimated downturn of approximately £40 million per annum to English sport compared with what had been received to date.

The council was further aware that, on examination, it was clear that lotteries in other countries had tended to start by bringing unique new resources to areas such as sport, but then permitted that position to be eroded. The council urged the Government to restate their commitment to the long-term funding of sport through its share of lottery income.

I know that the Minister has a sincere commitment to sport—I had the opportunity to act temporarily as his shadow for a few weeks after the election. When he was an Opposition Back Bencher in the previous Parliament, we worked together on several matters. I do not for a moment query his personal commitment, but he is aware of the danger of the Treasury grabbing money.

Reading the Sports Council's words about the world-class performance programme shows why lottery support is crucial to support top performers. Each year, the English Sports Council carries out public attitude surveys. We have been talking about "the people", so it is important to note that the surveys show that three quarters of adults think it is important that the country achieves international sporting success; seven out of 10 adults think it is important that lottery money is spent helping the country achieve international sporting success; and nine out of 10 adults who think international sporting success is important also think it is important that lottery funding should be spent helping the country achieve that success.

The summer Olympics are seen as the most important event in which the country should achieve success, followed closely by world championships in many sports and by the Paralympics. Again, the Minister knows that I have been involved, as he has, in much fund raising for sport for the disabled, especially Paralympic athletes.

The Minister and I agree that many more people care about sport than care about politics. When we are talking about lottery money being spent on sport, we must remember that that is what people who might not be interested in our debates do care about. As everyone acknowledges, there is a continuing and increasing financial need for additional support for our top British performers. That is highlighted by the concern about our falling performances at recent summer Olympics. In the past five games, the British Olympic placing has dropped successively from ninth place in Moscow in 1980 to 36th place in the medal table in Atlanta in 1996.

The lottery-funded world-class performance programme was launched by the previous Government on 14 November 1996, with the first awards announced the following spring after comprehensive consultation with national governing bodies and sports organisations, including the British Olympic Association and the Central Council of Physical Recreation. The Minister knows that that programme is strategically geared to support the nation's most talented sportsmen and sportswomen, to help them to win medals and trophies in international competition. To date, in the first year of the programme, some £23 million has been awarded to 30 sports, including £1.9 million for rowing, £2.26 million for athletics and £2 million for one of my favourite sports, swimming. To date, more than 1,622 athletes and performers have received support directly or indirectly from the lottery.

I echo the comments by many hon. Members on both sides of the House about the importance of supporting sport locally. My right hon. Friend the Member for South–West Surrey mentioned her pleasure in the improvement of cricket nets at Grayswood in her constituency—I know that club well, because a cricket club that I played for used to have an annual tour and Grayswood was one of the teams that we played every year. I certainly welcome that, and congratulate the club on the success of its lottery bid.

Sports lottery bids in my constituency and others that I support have already been completed. One in particular involves a swimming pool that is to have total public access; it is based at the successful Tomlinscote county secondary school in my constituency. However, I am concerned that groups in all our constituencies may not succeed so easily in those bids and that cricket clubs, rugby clubs, swimming pools and many other sporting events will not receive support.

There is no doubt that our top international competitors recognise the importance of lottery support. For example, one of our medal winners, Paul Palmer, nearly retired from swimming after winning the silver medal for Great Britain in the 400 m freestyle final in Atlanta. He now acknowledges that lottery support, which provided for his training facilities, contributed substantially to his gold medal in last year's European championships in Seville. The four-man bobsleigh team that won a bronze medal at Nagano trained and won the race in a bobsleigh that was provided by a capital grant from the lottery. Such support is essential.

The Sports Council knows that its funding and the funding to individual athletes is likely to diminish as a result of the Government's proposals. I am particularly concerned about that. There are other concerns about the Government's proposals, many of which have been touched on by my right hon. and hon. Friends and which I do not intend to repeat, but they were perhaps summed up by Lord Inglewood, who, in the debate on the Bill in another place, quoted my right hon. Friend the Member for South–West Surrey saying about the lottery:

"It's only a matter of time before it is all used for nurses' pay."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 1997; Vol. 584, c. 754.]

The hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) mentioned that she was a nurse and explained that she supported the Government's proposals, particularly the way in which the money was going into the health service. We all want successful health and education services, but it was the Labour party that said time after time in opposition, "We must not allow substitution of money from the lottery for general taxation revenue."

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I am coming to an end, so I will not give way to the hon. Lady again.

The Labour party pressed time and again to avoid the substitution of money from the lottery for general taxation revenue, in such sectors as health and education. Having called for bans to stop that happening, the Labour party is doing it itself. The Bill may contain some helpful things, but that is the foremost reason why the Government's main proposals undermine the additionality principle, which is greatly to be deplored. Labour said one thing in opposition and is doing something entirely different now that it is in government.

8.13 pm

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I am pleased to participate in the debate. I have listened with interest to many of the comments by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am particularly pleased to follow the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who made some interesting comments. He has an affinity with sport, which I share. However, I had not been aware that he had a keen interest only in swimming, because I understood from the records that he was also quite keen on running: in the build-up to the election, he ran from the marginal seat of Blackpool, South to the Tory safe seat of Surrey Heath.

Mr. Fraser: My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) must be good at running.

Mr. Murphy: I have no idea. Blackpool, South has now changed hands and is a Labour seat.

I am unashamed to say that I participate in the lottery. I think that I have participated in almost every weekend draw except one, and I participate regularly in the midweek draw. I use the word "participant" instead of "player". Perhaps "gambler" is more appropriate, but I do not feel that "lottery player" is the appropriate term, as I do not believe that participation in the lottery is a sport. Support from the lottery should go towards sport, but the lottery is not a sport, so I am a participant or a gambler in the lottery.

I represent Eastwood, which is one of the 50 areas throughout the United Kingdom that receive the least in terms of the sums granted through the National Lottery Charities Board. I hope that the debate is not simply about right hon. and hon. Members who feel that their

[Mr. Murphy]

constituencies may have had a raw deal in lottery allocation and who complain about that. The debate is about much more than simply arguing the case for one's constituency and for many of the worthy causes, charitable and otherwise, there.

However, that so far this evening, five or six hon. Members have identified the fact that their constituencies are at the bottom of the league table of lottery allocation. My constituency is no different. However, like many others, it benefits from lottery grant allocations to constituencies that it borders. It is on the outskirts of Glasgow. Although Eastwood and the local authority of East Renfrewshire may have a low place in the league table of lottery allocation, many of their citizens benefit as a consequence of the larger grants to the greater conurbation of Glasgow. That point should not be missed. The tables themselves miss that qualitative analysis of the benefit that people gain.

Why does Eastwood have a low place in the league table? There are two major reasons. One is that the constituency is made up of large areas of prosperous communities. It is a new community where, in some cases, perhaps a charity ethos has not yet fully developed, because there is a regular turnover of people who come and go. Because of that sense of prosperity, schools, Churches and other groups have an opportunity to raise their own charitable funds, rather than rely on the lottery board. Perhaps that explains why the part of the constituency that is relatively prosperous is a low attainer in respect of lottery grants.

The second part of the constituency is less prosperous, but has nevertheless been less capable of capturing much-needed lottery grants. It is partly because of the perceived distance between those who wish to gain funds and those who distribute the funds: the perceived inaccessibility of the process and the procedure.

I welcome the idea in the Bill of reducing complexity; of minimising the gap between those who seek lottery funding and those who provide it; of reducing that feeling of distance and perhaps increasing the sense of ownership of the whole process and procedure among people in the less prosperous areas in my constituency. I am not arguing that we have to dumb down the entire process to make it entirely simplistic, because that would be patronising, but we must strike a balance between qualitative information gathering and the idea that one has to have support from a lobbying organisation, access to solicitors, previous experience or expert advice.

Hon. Members throughout the country, regardless of which party they represent, have that experience. I have boys' football clubs in my constituency that perform very well in their leagues, but which could nevertheless benefit from moderate increased funding through the lottery. When I suggest to the volunteers who run those boys' football clubs that they should seek lottery grants, they say that they do not have time and do not understand the procedure. That is primarily because they are volunteers and do not have access to lobbyists or to expensive solicitors. That is the case for clubs at Busby and Barrhead.

Earlier in the debate, it was suggested that Members of Parliament should provide such advice. That is a valid argument. As a new Member of Parliament with a keen interest in the issue, I should like advice on how to facilitate that. We need to be trained, to ensure that we can advise our constituents on the most effective way to gain lottery funding.

Some Labour Members have admitted not only to not being regular participants in the lottery draws, but to having some trepidation about even filling in a lottery ticket. If some Members of Parliament have difficulty in filling in a lottery ticket, it would be surprising if there were not greater numbers who would find it difficult to fill in a lottery grant application form. If Members of Parliament are to advocate and champion broader participation and increased access to lottery funds, it would be helpful for us to receive information about how we can help.

During a debate on the Scotland Bill last week, I admitted that I was a keen follower of gambling in the recreational sense. I mentioned some horses whose names symbolised Conservative success or failure in Scotland. I hope that you entertain me in this argument, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there is a logical train of thought running through to the lottery. The horses that I mentioned were—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Tell it again. Tell it again.

Mr. Murphy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that encouragement. A horse called Parliamentarian was ridden by my namesake, Mr. Murphy. I said that the only factor that would prevent me from gambling on it was the presence of another horse in the race called Mr. Sleazy. On the same day, there was another horse called Blue Desert. I was heckled by a sedentary Conservative Member—not the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on that occasion—about how the horses performed. I should like to inform the House that they came first and second.

That was an unusual way for me to pick horses and predict the outcome of a race. With that experience in mind, I shall inform the House of my lottery numbers, in anticipation of a similar outcome.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The hon. Gentleman did not make it clear which horse came first and which came second. Will he clarify that?

Mr. Murphy: I would not intentionally mislead the House by trying to offer which way in the forecast they came round. The hon. Gentleman will know that if he had put on a reverse forecast, it would not matter which way round the horses came in, because the money would still be paid out on first and second.

In the hope of continuing that new quirk of fate in prediction, I shall tell the House my lottery numbers. I see that the hon. Member for New Forest, West has his pen ready. The numbers are: 7, 8, 17, 18, 30 and 44. I have selected those numbers religiously since the start of the lottery. If the hon. Gentleman wins the lottery this week, I shall expect at least a half share. I have been wonderfully successful so far. I have won with those numbers three times. Hon. Members will understand from the fact that I am still here that I did not win the jackpot. On three separate occasions, I have won the princely sum of £10. I hold out hope for future success.

I welcome the Bill. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides are aware of the perceived imbalance and London bias in the distribution of lottery money. I understand that there is a need for investment in central London, because London is the capital. However, my constituents perceive an imbalance towards London and a proximity between those who receive the funds and those who distribute them. I am glad to see details in the Bill of ways of improving the awarding of grants through a strategy based on need and policy directions by the Secretary of State. I should like further details tonight or in Committee on how that will operate.

Conservative Members have made some unusual comments about cronyism. That is strange, coming from a party which tried to create a quango state based on cronyism. We shall take no lessons from them. There is understandable cynicism in the country because of the previous Government's performance in huge areas of public life. There will be genuine concern that we should not indulge in cronyism.

I also welcome the opportunity of greater proactivity. Rather than awaiting applications, we can initiate or solicit them. I have mentioned the volunteers in my constituency who perform valuable tasks, often with very little thanks. If they were encouraged, they would get involved in the process, but they lack the initial spark. Perhaps it is my responsibility as their Member of Parliament to provide it.

A number of organisations in Eastwood and east Renfrewshire—as in other parts of the country—have failed in their applications because of a technicality or because of a lack of clear analysis of what they wanted to do with the money. I should welcome more detailed feedback and clarification on why certain bids do not succeed. My constituents would then know why they had not been successful and how they could improve their bid for a future application. That would be appropriate not just for the bowling clubs, rugby clubs and tennis clubs at Crofthead, Shanks and Whitecraigs in my constituency, but for organisations that are partially successful—or even those that are completely successful, to enable them to repeat their success.

I should like to mention two organisations from my constituency; one because it is unusual and the other because of the brilliant work that it does. The first is Wummin Drummin. Having grown up in the same city as me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will understand the name of that organisation. For those who have not lived in Glasgow, Wummin Drummin is ladies playing musical instruments. It exists to enable mothers on low incomes to become involved in the arts and performing with musical instruments. The organisation plays a great role in the community life of Barrhead.

The other successful organisation is the Eastwood mental health forum. Those who experience mental difficulties and those who care for them very much welcome that lottery funding. Those organisations and others—all too few—in my constituency that have been successful in their bids would like continued feedback on why they were successful and how they and organisations of a similar ilk can continue to be successful.

Before I address two areas that do not directly relate to the Bill, I shall refer to the New Opportunities Fund. Feedback on that in my constituency has been positive. Conservative Members have said that it simply replaces public expenditure and that general taxation should be used. That is not a coherent argument, on the basis that the Conservatives failed to provide so many of the opportunities that the new fund will set about providing. It will radically transform the lives of so many people.

Much comment has already been made about child care opportunities and healthy living centres. Such expenditure and investment might not be made and such opportunities might not be provided without the New Opportunities Fund. I welcome the fund, and my constituents welcome it. If all hon. Members were honest, they would recognise that our constituents welcome the imaginative approach to using what is, after all, the people's money to target the people's priorities.

I now come to the role of sport. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath, who I understand had to attend a constituency engagement, talked about the role of sport and commented on the view of the English Sports Council on the legislation. Today, I have been in contact with the Scottish Sports Council. I discussed the Bill with it, as I did with many organisations, including voluntary organisations, in Scotland.

I do not wish to set the Scottish Sports Council against the English Sports Council in any way—heaven forfend, I have already created competition between Scottish and English Members of Parliament, by helping to organise a football game between the two groups at Wembley on 11 May. However, perhaps that is not competition enough, as the Scots are guaranteed success at Wembley for the first time in more than a decade.

The comments of the Scottish Sports Council are not markedly different from the concerns expressed by the English Sports Council in respect of priorities and the role of sport in the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. I echo the comments made to me by the Scottish Sports Council, with which I know the Minister will agree, that it is crucial that, as we continue to invest in science, technology and the arts, sport is not in any way forgotten. In many people's minds, sport is a form of art anyway.

The New Opportunities Fund provides a great opportunity to promote the role of sport. I should welcome comments either this evening or in Committee about the role of after-school clubs and healthy living centres. After-school clubs can be about homework, helping in the community or simply schoolwork—all of which are important—but they can also provide an excellent extra-curricular opportunity, to encourage young people to become involved in a sport in the safety of the school and the community, which is crucial if we are to invest in stars of the future. I hope that healthy living centres profile the importance of personal fitness and the role that sport provides. I should welcome a commitment from the Minister about the absolute importance of sport in all those areas. With such assurances, the concerns of the Scottish Sports Council and, indeed, of the English Sports Council, can be overcome.

Finally—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] This is the first time that I have heard Conservative Members say that during one of my speeches.

Although the issue of international grants is not directly addressed in the Bill, it is important for the House to declare its opinion on it. Organisations based in the United Kingdom that work abroad have the opportunity to access grants, and it is crucial that that continues. In a previous

[Mr. Murphy]

incarnation, I combined the concept of international aid, grants and support from the arts when I was fortunate enough to organise a tour of a play throughout Scotland, which supported international aid projects, especially in southern Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Angola. In its very, very small way, that was helpful to the small number of people who were fortunate to gain from it. That is an example of art dovetailing well with international aid.

I should like to put it on record that the concept of British lottery funds supporting other countries is crucial. The ethos of Live Aid and Comic Relief should be maintained in the distribution of lottery funds. In preparing for the debate, I took the opportunity to ask about some of the grants that are provided for British organisations that work internationally. Many such grants are consistent with the charity drive of Live Aid, Comic Relief and many other organisations, such as Actionaid and the many reputable organisations of which hon. Members on both sides of the House are patrons. The concept of providing primary education in Mozambique is consistent with the idea of Live Aid and Comic Relief, and the desires of people in the UK. Providing health care in Kenya is important, as are grants to Actionaid that support education in Uganda.

Such an approach to lottery funding and support is in keeping with the British spirit of giving. In that spirit, I very much welcome the Bill and hope that it creates once and for all the people's lottery, which meets the people's needs.

8.37 pm

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I shall confine my comments to the Bill rather than giving a Cook's tour of my extra-curricular activities, as the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) did. I should tell him, however, that I have just won a bet on the length of his speech. If he would like to exercise his talents in other ways, I strongly recommend him to join the all-party racing and bloodstock group. I would welcome him willingly, considering the tips that he has given us in the debate.

No one questions the success of the national lottery. More than 94 per cent. of the adult population have played it. More people regularly take part in the lottery than voted in the general election. Labour Members who have said otherwise and have commented on the general election should be reminded of that; life did not begin on 1 May.

Not only has the lottery become a national institution, but it has a major impact on the quality of life in Britain by raising significant sums for the five original good causes, strengthening community ties by improved access to cultural and leisure activities, and promoting economic regeneration. According to a recent report by the Royal Bank of Scotland, the lottery has created and safeguarded 13,000 jobs. Of course, it boosts retail trade, too.

At the end of 1997, 22 national lottery awards had been made to projects in my constituency. Since then, a major award in excess of £85,000 has been made to Dorset Wildlife Trust to acquire 100 acres of heathland at Upton, which will be managed as a nature reserve. Smaller grants made to charities and to heritage, sports and arts budgets have benefited from the £4.9 billion that has been raised for good causes.

I cannot say whether any of the 544 new millionaires created since the lottery began live in my constituency, but I can say that thousands of my constituents enjoy a flutter, and an occasional win. They embrace the principle that the national lottery was set up to restore our heritage and to promote projects that will become a source of national pride.

The Government are happy to pay tribute to the great success of the national lottery. I suppose that it would be churlish to say that the lottery is yet another Conservative achievement which they are now happy to embrace. Now, however, they propose to tamper with it and undermine it, as they have with other national institutions. To them, making things new seems as important as making things work.

Yet again, the initiative is Treasury led. Proceeds from the lottery will be diverted to Treasury so-called good causes, in addition to the money that it already receives from ticket sales, because the Government do not have the political will to raise taxes.

The Bill will turn the national lottery into a state lottery. Mainstream public spending projects will now be funded in that way, despite the Prime Minister's affirmation in the White Paper, "The People's Lottery". That has been referred to many times, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) has already quoted from it, so I shall not do so again.

Thus, important principles of the national lottery are overturned at a stroke. Despite the Secretary of State's earlier comments, I am sceptical of his assurances about the additionality principle. The principle that lottery funds should be distributed by bodies operating independently of Government is in jeopardy. A proportion of the local initiatives that strengthen communities will be replaced.

That is another example of the Government's determination to centralise power, under the cloak of the description, "the people's". As has been said, that phrase has been used in many other areas throughout the world, especially in the eastern European communist regimes, so it is interesting to hear Labour Ministers and their official spokesmen using that phrase in the context of the present Government.

It is no good the Government's claiming that the New Opportunities Fund initiatives are optional or additional to the initiatives currently funded from the public purse. Despite what the Secretary of State said, I believe that, as my hon. Friends have already said, they fall within the normal Government spending responsibilities of health, education and the environment—all areas in which the Labour party, which now forms the Government, made manifesto pledges before the election.

Spending programmes are constantly evolving, but, even applying the most creative accounting, the Government cannot rightly transfer to the national lottery the cost of such evolution. If the only changes being introduced are new social aspects of spending programmes, such as the training of teachers and librarians in information technology, the Government are not doing their job properly if they fund them from the lottery. I had intended to say that that was the thin end of the wedge, but I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who has already said that it is the thick end of the wedge.

I question some specific aspects of the Bill. For example, what will the healthy living centres be? I have written down several ideas for what they might be, but we must ask how they will compete with the services already offered by the national health service. Do they represent another way in which to reduce the expenditure of taxpayers' money on GP services, pharmacists' charges and preventive medicine? I look forward to hearing the Minister's response later. A network of such centres is promised—a strategic plan, no doubt, for the Secretary of State promises to acquire the power to exercise greater control over how lottery money is spent, not only on its pet projects, but geographically.

I admit that the south-west has done well, and my area has participated in that; 10.3 per cent. of awards, excluding countrywide awards, have come the south-west's way. That is less than the proportion for London, of course. None the less, the awards made in the south-west represent a tribute to the people who have devoted time, effort and imagination to the submission of applications for funds.

I have first-hand experience of that. I was a district councillor before becoming a Member of Parliament, and I applied for a lottery grant for the improvement of a council estate in my ward that had been neglected for 55 years while it had had a Labour councillor. I am pleased to say that in the first year after I was elected, we applied for a grant. With great success, we achieved what we set out to do on the second occasion, with support from local people who cared about where they lived. That experience is relevant to the Bill.

If, as I suspect, the Secretary of State wishes to tackle what some in the House see as a regional imbalance in the distribution of lottery money, he is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water and getting rid of the diversity inherent in the voluntary and community initiatives that come forward.

The national lottery was set up to stimulate community activity by creating opportunities for local people to form groups to apply for grants and find matching funding. That opportunity has been seized and turned to best advantage throughout the country. It is interesting to note that most of the grants go to London, which temporarily has a majority of Labour-held seats. Any Labour Member who says that he or she does not see the benefits of the lottery is misinformed.

Now, it seems, the Government believe that local initiatives can be imposed from the centre. The lottery sports fund has committed £680 million to 2,500 capital projects, resulting in enormous benefits. More than 90 per cent. of all the schemes approved have been for community-level projects, most of which have cost less than £100,000. That is laudable.

The key to ensuring equitable distribution has been the adoption of two policies—the priority areas initiative, through which increased support is given to the most deprived areas of greatest social need, and the school community sport initiative, through which increased support is given to school projects that also provide guaranteed access for the local community out of school hours.

Despite what the Secretary of State said, independent monitoring of the first 320 completed projects has shown that for sport, investment in bricks and mortar is really investment in people. For example, participation by the under-18s has tripled, as has participation by women, and participation by people with disabilities has doubled. Schools are opening up for the community out of traditional hours, playing time has been extended and coaching opportunities have been increased.

In my constituency, the community in Alderney is looking forward to the opening of a splendid new sports centre at the Martin Kemp Welch school, which incorporates a competition-sized swimming pool, a trampoline facility and a centre of excellence for gymnastics. That magnificent development at a school making great strides to improve its image within the community that it serves—I am pleased to say that I had a preview of the facilities when I visited the school last month—has been built with a grant from the national lottery equating to £2.5 million. It will be open to the community out of school hours and it will provide a much-needed centre for local people, young, old and disabled alike.

That lottery application, submitted by the borough of Poole before the establishment of the school community sport initiative, will benefit an area much in need of such facilities. In other parts of the country, by using deprivation indices as a measure of assessment, the Sports Council has been able to ensure that the areas of most need achieve lottery support. Surely that is more important than pure geography, in the form of a map covered in equidistant coloured pins, which seems to be what is proposed.

By permitting the distributing bodies to solicit bids, and requiring them to produce strategic plans, the Government not only increase their own power, but discourage the initiative of local people, which has been the backbone of the lottery's success in supporting grassroots sport at community level.

Demand for grants from the lottery sport fund exceeds supply by a ratio of 4:1. The financial instructions to the fund stipulate how much information the distributors have to collect, the partnership funding that applicants have to provide, and how the distributing bodies are to monitor lottery awards.

That approach has worked well, but now the Secretary of State wants to move the goalposts. He seeks to solicit applications, although there is no shortage of applications. Awards will be made on a whim and a fancy, irrespective of whether there is community support for a project.

The present model of awards is transparent and, I believe, free from accusations of political gerrymandering. It would be interesting to hear how the Minister—neither he nor any of his ministerial colleagues is present in the Chamber—intends that positive characteristic to continue.

The national lottery has exceeded expectations. The good causes expected to benefit, as they have, from public enthusiasm and support, and to receive their fair share of the £1 billion excess that is projected over the next seven years of the lottery's operation; not least, they expected the Government to keep their election promise that the New Opportunities Fund would be introduced to replace the millennium fund.

Now, we are presented with a sixth good cause, as well as the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, so everybody's relative share will fall. Good causes will lose out. The Secretary of State tried to talk

[Mr. Christopher Fraser]

his way out of that broken promise by suggesting that they will get at least as much as they would have done had the national lottery been less successful.

The White Paper said:

"although the existing good causes will be receiving a smaller share of lottery revenue, the success of the lottery means that they can still plan on receiving the same amount as envisaged when the lottery was set up."

The House should dwell on this point: in essence, the Secretary of State is saying to the good causes that they will get less in the future, but that they should try to forget that, because the Government expect them to get the same amount as was predicted when the lottery was still a paper concept. He is telling them, "Close your eyes, forget the experience of the most successful lottery in the world and be grateful for getting less."

Some people use words to illuminate their message; others to emasculate it. I shall leave it to the House to judge into which category Ministers—none is present—have fallen tonight. Were the matter not so serious, it would be laughable. The Heritage Lottery Fund, in particular, fears for its ability to undertake larger projects in future, when it could be considered the very essence of the lottery's existence to restore our heritage and create projects of which Britain will be proud.

Somehow, the Government manage to blame the people for their reforms, suggesting that responses to the consultation exercise represent the views of a cross-section of society or of those who play each week. Many hon. Members have talked about that, and, when pushed, Government Members have not been able to put their finger on the figures. In fact, only 92 individuals took the trouble to reply. The support of the 496 lobby groups, local authorities and schools, all of which stand to gain from the Bill's proposals, apparently gives the Government a mandate to meddle and to blunder.

The Secretary of State said that he sees one of his roles as "restoring public confidence" in the national lottery—"the people's lottery"—but the numbers playing and the amount awarded to good causes have never been greater. All the evidence points to the fact that the people are happy with their lottery.

The Secretary of State is playing politics with the lottery. He will be seen as the great plunderer of the 20th century—dare I say a Robin Hood in reverse, taking from the people to supplement and pay for the Government? If he gets his way, and the Bill is enacted, he may find that his abiding contribution is to be remembered as the Minister who undermined confidence in the most successful lottery in the world.

8.53 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), because it gives me the chance to take on some of the big mythologies that Opposition Members have peddled tonight. They suggest that redistributing lottery money to the people and getting it down to smaller organisations that do not have the necessary resources at present to back up their applications by matching funding will benefit only the Government and not the people.

I do not understand how Conservative Members can continually peddle that logic; perhaps they hope that if they say it often enough, it will stick. The people know that when we redistribute the lottery money in accordance with the Bill, we shall allow access to people who were denied it before.

The hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole made great play about our heritage crumbling away. For 18 years, his party was responsible for our heritage and allowed it to crumble away. The previous Government used the lottery to do things that they were unable to do through their own policies because they had made such a mess of the economy.

The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) spoke well. He spoke about the five original causes that were listed and that he thought were correct, but the Secretary of State informed us that, before the general election, the right hon. Gentleman himself talked about the possibility of using lottery money to bring teachers back into schools to teach sports. That was clearly an intention to move.

Why do we have to get into this ridiculous posturing, when we want simply to move sensibly from where we are to where we want to be? The three matters that are outlined to be added to the lottery's five functions—access, excellence and education—should be applauded. There is nothing wrong with trying to move in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole suggests that we can give people absolutely more than they thought they would get, simply because there is more money in the coffers, but that it is somehow wrong to have another cause. When any funding or fundraising agency creates more money, we should not simply keep going on in the same way, giving more to the original ideas, when there are some new ideas to which the money can be applied.

If we are to get an estimated £10 billion up until the time when Camelot goes—or its licence is renewed—we should use it in a different way, and that is what we intend to do. The Bill and the White Paper set that out. The hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole should have read the document: it tells us what healthy living centres are. They are new and important, and were not provided for in expenditure by the previous Government.

Mr. Lansley: In the same breath, the hon. Gentleman talks about the possibility of £10 billion being obtained for good causes from the lottery and speculates about Camelot losing its licence. What contribution does he think Camelot has made to the fact that we will get not the £8.8 billion that it forecast, but perhaps £10 billion or more? Perhaps he would like to give a bit of credit where it is due.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman should have listened and responded to what I actually said. I corrected myself when I talked about when the Camelot licence runs out, and added that it might be renewed. If he looks at *Hansard*, he will see that I said, "or it is renewed". The licence may well be renewed. I do not want to be involved in a competition between Camelot and any other provider.

We will work on the basis set down in the White Paper and try to get the maximum amount for good causes, with efficiency, and Camelot could be the organisation to do that. I have no axe to grind with any organisation that

may run the lottery, but I applaud the fact that Camelot has bought out GTech and taken away some of the smell that surrounded its operation.

Mr. Fraser: You made reference to what I said about healthy living centres. If you were listening to my comments so carefully, perhaps you would like to stand up—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst) *rose—*

Mr. Fraser: Perhaps you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down if I am on my feet. He should remember that he is addressing the Chair when he says "you".

Mr. Fraser: If the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) was listening so intently to my comments earlier—which I doubt—perhaps he would like to give a direct response to a couple of questions about the healthy living centres.

Mr. Connarty: I refer the hon. Gentleman to pages 14 and 15 of the White Paper and suggest that he reads it for himself.

It is important to see the new good cause for what it is: something additional that people want. They want what is being offered in health, education and the environment. They want the New Opportunities Fund, which has been applauded. To slight the 400 organisations that took the trouble to write in and may gain something for the people whom they represent or work with is to do down many good voluntary organisations that will benefit from the new use of the fund.

It is right to take the new direction that is on offer: to people and not to bricks and mortar. I want to put a couple of examples on the record, because it is worth letting people know. Many people think not that the lottery is doing anything wrong, but simply that it needs to do some other things.

I certainly applaud the Millennium Commission's decision to give £32 million to the canal link project, which will link the Forth and Clyde canals and open up the waterway once again from Grangemouth on the Forth in my constituency right across to Glasgow and the Clyde. It will also link the Union canal through an imaginative large wheel that will lift boats and barges into the Forth and Clyde canal. It will link Edinburgh to Glasgow. There is potential for 4,000 jobs in the long term, particularly in tourism and hospitality.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: I will not give way because I know that other hon. Members want to speak.

Such projects are imaginative and important for the economy. They are to be applauded. It is not a matter of saying that what is done, when it is done, is not being done well; it is that other things can be done. A good example is YOGI, the Youth of Grangemouth Initiative. It is a SOBAR—a soft drinks only bar, which was given lottery funding. It was thought up by young people, and is run by young people for the benefit of the young in Grangemouth, the main port in my constituency.

There is also Laurieston senior citizens' welfare hall, which has applied three times for lottery funding to do something with the hall. It is run by volunteers, purely on subscriptions and charity, for the older people in the village, who have not been able to get access to funding. It is important that the New Opportunities Fund gives such small organisations a chance of access.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: No, other hon. Members want to speak and I do not want to take up too much time.

It is important that such people get access. It is clear that the way in which the Government are looking at the lottery in the Bill, which we will debate in detail in Committee, will allow access and open up opportunities. There were many criticisms of the lottery, not necessarily for what it did, but for the structures that surrounded it. We are going to deal with regulation. The pressure on one Oflot regulator will be spread over a commission. That is to be applauded because it is what the people want. People are happy to see GTech leave Camelot. Perhaps people will reassess how Camelot works. The main thing is to give access to the money to the many places in Britain, many of which were mentioned today, that have not yet had access in proportion to their need or to what would be justified. Other important causes have taken much more of the money than people feel happy with.

I am sure that the constituents of Conservative Members feel the same way. It is disingenuous to pretend that they do not have constituents like mine who want a different distribution so that different causes get the money. I am sure that when the Bill is passed and we are running the lottery as we plan, Conservative Members will line up with their organisations to get access to the New Opportunities Fund, healthy living centres and after-school facilities, just as I will. It is time they stopped all this dog-in-the-manger, yah-boo politics and realised that we are trying to make the lottery better. We are not trying to steal from it for any purpose that would not be applauded by the public. Whether the Opposition like it or not, it is the people's lottery. I am not embarrassed by saying that. It is important that more people get some lottery money for the causes that they work for.

9.2 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Secretary of State said one unarguably right thing in his opening speech: the Bill symbolises the Government and all their works. I whole-heartedly endorse that because, apart from a few welcome touches around the edges, the salient facts about the Bill are that it is a centralising measure which takes power away from individuals and gives it to the Government; it is designed by and for the Treasury, not the people; and it relies on a huge gap between rhetoric and reality to try to make the political points that the Government seek to make by introducing it.

That point was well illustrated by many of the speeches of Labour Members. Several talked about the benefits of greater access to sport. I was especially interested by the contribution of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), with his well-known enthusiasm for football and other sports, who gave a very guarded welcome to the Bill. I agree with his caution and concern, but he did not go far enough. All Labour Members who have pleaded

[Mr. Damian Green]

the cause of sport and agreed that the lottery has been good for it seem not to have noticed that the Bill is a direct hit on the interests of sport as well as of the arts, heritage and charities. It is designed to reduce the lottery resources available to the original good causes. Those who seek to pray in aid the Bill in support of those good causes are dead wrong.

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend listened with care to Labour Members. Did he notice that several of them admitted that they did not purchase lottery tickets? Does not that remind him that they are keen to decide how money should be spent but have not contributed to it? That is at odds with their claim to understand the priorities of the players of the lottery.

Mr. Green: It was ever the case that Labour Members were better at spending other people's money than buying their way to success.

One can admire the Secretary of State's ability as a performance artist. Keeping a straight face while trying to tell the House that this is not a convenient way for the Chancellor to indulge in some off-balance sheet spending requires true thespian abilities. He should apply for an Arts Council grant for his acting skills, but the Bill means that such grants will be more difficult to get.

The Secretary of State falls down, and his presentation lacks credibility, because the Bill fails the old fashioned duck test. If it looks like a duck, waddles and quacks, it is probably a duck. If the people were asked whether spending on schools and the health service is core public spending that should be funded by the Government, they would say yes. This spending is clearly mainstream public spending. It does not pass the duck test. The Government's tortuous attempts to claim that it meets the additionality principle patently go against common sense.

It is important to be clear where the Government are being most disingenuous, to use what I think is the parliamentary word for what I want to say. The first claim, which is particularly risible, is that their proposals put decision making further down the chain and devolve power and influence away from the centre to local communities. That is not slightly wide of the mark; the exact opposite is the truth.

According to the Bill, the New Opportunities Fund will distribute funds for initiatives

"specified by the Secretary of State."

It could not get much more centralist than that, and that is precisely what the Bill is meant to achieve. The Secretary of State will decide which initiatives should be supported by the fund. I beg to differ with what the Bill says will happen. In fact, as we all know, the initiatives would be specified by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, depending on the stage of the electoral cycle. That is only one example of where the Secretary of State is being disingenuous.

The Secretary of State also attempts to claim that the existing good causes—which have received widespread public assent in the four years since the lottery was introduced—will not suffer. That is a patent absurdity. The share which the good causes receive of the lottery funds will fall from 20 per cent. to 16⅔ per cent.—all of them except, by some deep coincidence, the good cause which is being run personally by the Minister without Portfolio which, by processes of enormous analysis, has been kept at 20 per cent. That is a shrewd move by the Secretary of State and his ministerial team.

The reason why the Government are being disingenuous is the simple fact that we cannot spend the same pound twice. The pound that is being spent on the new good cause created by the Government will not now be spent on sport, arts or heritage. To attempt to claim that existing good causes will not suffer simply will not wash. That is not just because of what anyone in the House says—it will not wash because real sportspeople will suffer. People will make applications for grants that would have been given before, but which may not be given in future. Village halls will not be improved, and historic buildings will not be repaired. The areas of life where people now regard lottery money as important will be affected, and people will hold the Government responsible for that.

There will be more disappointment for applicants as time goes on, partly because of the increase in the awareness of the lottery and partly because the quality of bids has naturally improved as people have become more used to making applications. Originally, the Sports Council lottery fund was granting two out of three of the applications it received. Now, that figure has dropped to one in four, partly because it gets more applications and partly because the quality of applications has improved. Already, large numbers are being disappointed. Through the Bill, the Government will ensure that a larger proportion of people are disappointed.

That is disingenuous because the Government have suggested today that this is somehow a pain-free procedure—that we can create a sixth good cause, and that nice things will happen in schools and healthy living centres without anybody being hurt. That is patently not true, and the Government are being dishonest in claiming that it is.

Mr. Lansley: Earlier, my hon. Friend asked the Secretary of State to speculate on whether, in the view of the acting director general, GTech will be a fit and proper person to act as a service provider. If we follow through that hypothesis and if, as a result, lottery revenues were to be interrupted for a period and to fall below the £10 billion figure for good causes, the Secretary of State has given no assurance that the amount provided to each of the first five good causes would not fall below £1.8 billion.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend raises a good point which I hope the Minister for Sport will address when he replies. It is a genuinely ticklish problem. We do not know what the acting director general will recommend. If he recommends that GTech should be thrown out of the lottery, clearly that will pose a severe danger to the revenue-raising capacity of the lottery. If he does not recommend that, all well and good. I want an assurance from the Minister that there will be no political interference in the decision by the acting director general.

I mentioned the Sports Council fund, and the Heritage Lottery Fund has suffered as well. There have been various sneering references to the Churchill papers, but most awards given by the Heritage Lottery Fund are small. A typical example from my constituency is the

Little Chart village hall. It is situated in a conservation area and, although it is not of major heritage merit, the parish council and the Heritage Lottery Fund believed that its repair would benefit the community. It received a grant of more than £13,000, which paid for 90 per cent. of the cost of repairs. The hall now provides an important meeting place for local groups. That is exactly the type of grant which, I am sure, all of us have had in our constituencies and have welcomed.

The Secretary of State also claimed that this is a long-term programme, but this is initiative-itis. The programmes will last for two or three years and, by the end of the third year, the bids under the New Opportunities Fund programme will be building up. However, there will then be a new Secretary of State who will be told by the Treasury that he needs new initiatives, and the existing ones are likely to wither on the vine.

The long-term effect on the good causes is equally serious. Once the percentage has been cut once, it can be cut again—the Government know that. I hope that the Minister will give the commitment asked for by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), that there will be no further cut in the percentage for a considerable time.

The Secretary of State's worst claim is that there is an extra £1 billion to play with, so it does not matter that money is being taken away from the existing good causes. The reason why some of my right hon. and hon. Friends feel strongly about that is the complete reluctance of any Labour Member to pay any tribute to Camelot for running an efficient lottery for the past four years. There is £1 billion extra for Ministers to dip their hands into, because we have had an extremely well-run national lottery. The Secretary of State managed to get his lips to pay tribute to the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), for setting up the lottery. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to accept the Minister's sedentary assurance that it was a genuine tribute. However, in this debate and previous discussion of the lottery in the House, it has been observable that Ministers have expressed nothing but contempt for and disparagement of Camelot.

I should be genuinely grateful if the Minister could bring himself to admit, with a genuine smile on his face, that Camelot—by and large—has done a good job, that the national lottery was not necessarily going to be a success and that one reason for its success has been the fact that it has been run by some efficient people.

Mr. Lansley: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only has Camelot already delivered £4.9 billion by way of revenue to good causes, compared to a forecast of slightly more than £4 billion, but it accepted the downside risk of, for example, penalties of £1 million a day if it did not deliver a successful national lottery on the day that it pledged in the contract, over a very short time scale? No doubt the Secretary of State is introducing a further risk of penalties—unlimited financial penalties, which were not in the contract that was entered into at the start of the franchise.

Mr. Green: That is absolutely right. The lottery is still a risky business, and it was especially risky four years ago. Of course, Guy Snowden had to go, and Camelot may well have been sensible to buy out the GTech share. I do not believe that Opposition Members would say anything in defence of the improper behaviour that went on, but it seems to me that we have lacked balance, and that the Government quietly ignore the fact that we have the world's most successful lottery.

That leads me to comment on another wrong claim by the Secretary of State—that the lottery was set up so badly that he needs to change it radically. That sits very ill with the fact that hon. Members on both sides of the House admit that, instead of the projected £9 billion that Camelot was going to raise throughout its licence period, the figure is now projected to be at least £10 billion, and it is a pretty open secret in the world of those who are most interested in the lottery that that could increase to £10.5 billion.

Opposition Members would like hard information about what the Government plan to do if that figure exceeds £10 billion. Will the money be siphoned off to new, exciting good causes to be invented by the Secretary of State or the Chancellor, or will it be given to the existing good causes?

There is genuine danger in this constant campaign of denigration. So far, apparently, it has had no effect on people playing the lottery; even at the height of the rows that have affected Camelot and the lottery generally, people's willingness to play the lottery does not appear to have been affected. However, a consistent campaign by Labour Members of denigration of the lottery operator is likely gradually to reduce people's willingness to play the lottery, which will reduce the amount of money for good causes. I cannot believe that any hon. Member on either side of the House would welcome that.

The idea that the lottery needs to be rebalanced to make it fair is curious. I was interested to hear Labour Members, including the hon. Members for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) and for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), say that their constituencies had done badly out of the lottery and that they were happy that there would be new arrangements, giving more power to the Secretary of State, which would make possible a fairer distribution. That is interesting, for several reasons.

If there is a change in the distribution, there will be losers. If all the constituencies whose hon. Members say have done badly are going to do better, obviously many hon. Members' constituencies will do worse. It is especially apposite that the Minister for Sport is replying to the debate because, for all we know, he could be next week's "Stop Ken" candidate for the mayor of London, and we know that the part of the country that has done best out of the lottery is London. I shall be happy to hear him say whether he believes that less lottery money will be spent in London in future, and whether that is the aim of the greater fairness that many of his hon. Friends appear to want.

I am also slightly disturbed that Labour Members seem to accept that, by being nice to the Secretary of State, they may begin to win more lottery money for their constituencies. It gives rise to the horrendous idea of new types of sleaze, such as lottery grants for creepy questions at Question Time or possibly the creation of a seventh good cause, the Whips' narks fund. The Government could award money from that fund to any Labour Member who was particularly bright towards the Prime Minister at Question Time.

[Mr. Green]

The Government are not fooling anyone with this legislation: it is the Treasury's first dip into the honeypot. I am sure that the Government will come back for more. The good causes are right to be worried, and so are Britain's sportspeople, artists, heritage lovers and charity workers. The Bill marks the transformation of the national lottery into a Government lottery. That is why it deserves, and will get, strong opposition from the Conservatives.

9.19 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): When the national lottery was introduced, it had the support of both sides of the House. That point was ably made today by that great champion of sport, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry). I also congratulate all those hon. Members who have contributed to the debate today.

In 1993, both sides welcomed the creation of a distinct source of funding for the arts, sport, heritage, charities and projects to mark the millennium. It was as though a fairy godmother had come to the aid of the Cinderellas of public spending. By total contrast, this Bill fundamentally and intentionally flouts the basis on which the lottery was originally established.

The Government's case will be summed up by the Minister for Sport. In his own words, he is evolving from a

"bar-room sage to a world statesman".

Perhaps tonight the final piece of his personal jigsaw puzzle will fall into place. Will the hon. Gentleman be accepted by the most ludicrous group in the country, Labour's precious luvvies? We await his words with bated breath. We know that he will have finally arrived when his name is mentioned with approval over gleaming plates of foie gras in large and expensive houses in north London. What an opportunity for the Minister tonight.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) pointed out, within three minutes of the commencement of the Second Reading debate on the National Lottery etc. Bill in January 1993, one Back Bencher hit the nail on the head in an intervention when he sought crystal clear assurances about the key and critical issue of replacing central Government spending. What extraordinary prescience. That Back Bencher was the Minister who is to reply this evening. We have heard much lately about thinking the unthinkable. Tonight, the hon. Gentleman should, by any standards, be squirming in his shoes when he must defend the indefensible.

The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 was passed with real integrity of purpose. I salute my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) in that regard. It was carried through effectively by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and maintained in the same spirit by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). What a contrast with the Labour party tonight. In a speech before the election, the then Prime Minister said:

"what the"

arts

"sector has a right to expect from government is clarity, commitment and consistency".

However personally agreeable the Secretary of State may be, he, his Ministers and his Back Benchers know full well of the genuine anger that is directed towards him in the arts community. The reason is twofold. First, all the nods and winks before the election about financial support have proved hollow. Secondly, among those who work to preserve and promote our heritage and those in the caring charities and in sport, there is dismay at the way in which the Secretary of State, through the Bill, is letting down the very people whom his Department was set up to help. The national lottery was put under the control of the then Department of National Heritage and not the Treasury, so that the Department could fund the areas for which it had actual responsibility. Not all the money was to come from the lottery, but it was never the intention that the lottery should be used to subsidise the budgets of other Departments. As we have heard today, however, that is exactly what is proposed in this shoddy Bill.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's case. He claims that arts bodies are annoyed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which is a serious charge. I know the Secretary of State, and I know arts bodies; I know that my right hon. Friend is very popular. Will the hon. Gentleman name three organisations that are at odds with my right hon. Friend?

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman has only to pick up the newspapers to see that, every day, articles are written by those in the arts community who are disgusted at the way in which the Government are failing to carry out the nods and winks commitments that they made before the election. If he has not observed that, I fear that he is reading the wrong newspapers.

We vigorously oppose the Bill, which has no purpose other than to make a shabby and unprincipled raid on the lottery. As many respondents to the White Paper observed, the Government are breaching the additionality principle—they should at least have the courage to own up to it.

The English Sports Council summed up the problem in a letter that it wrote to me yesterday. It said:

"The ESC is aware that on examination existing international Lotteries have tended to start by bringing unique new resources to areas such as sport, then this funding has been eroded in favour of areas more closely related to core policy areas.

The ESC seeks assurances from the Government to restate the commitment to the long term funding of sport through its share of Lottery income."

The ESC may have to wait a very long time.

We utterly reject the Secretary of State's assertion that he is adhering to the principle of additionality as set out by the Prime Minister in the White Paper. I do not for a moment think that the public—or the people, as the Secretary of State is so fond of referring to them—will be fooled. They know that health, education and the environment are core Government responsibilities. They will not be convinced by his shifty explanations of additionality. They will see that the Government are brazenly using the lottery for their public spending programmes.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman says that health, education and the environment are core Government responsibilities. Of course they are, but are not the arts and sport also core Government responsibilities?

Mr. Spring: For the edification of the Secretary of State, I shall read what the Prime Minister said in the White Paper:

"We don't believe that it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, of course the public want improvements in health, education and the environment. Increasingly, however, they know that they were deceived before the general election.

"Education, education, education" has, in practice, meant fewer people in higher education, bigger class sizes and cuts in school budgets. "Fourteen days to save the national health service" has, in practice, meant anything from the removal of ambulance cover to soaring waiting lists throughout the country. Perhaps the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) should discuss those issues with his constituents.

The public will quickly discover that the money is being diverted from elsewhere. When the lottery money for capital projects in sport and the arts, for schemes to improve access to our heritage and for financing the work of small charities begins to dry up, they will know what the Government have done.

Will the Secretary of State tonight guarantee the percentages for the good causes beyond 2001? If not, he will be sending out the most negative message. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said, the confidence of the distribution bodies hangs on that.

The irony of Labour's proposals and of all their rhetoric about "the people" is that the Bill will do nothing to empower individuals or groups of people to make a difference to their lives. The Bill is all about empowering Government. Nasty, authoritarian Governments have always centralised power in the name of the people. There was certainly nothing democratic about the so-called "people's democracies" of eastern Europe. Instead of enhancing the role of the public, the Bill seeks to centralise the power of the Secretary of State like some aging people's commissar.

Part of the lottery's triumph has been its success in strengthening the local loyalties that are essential to civic society. It has reinforced local institutions and made possible the creation of new ones. I am not talking about the grand projects that have benefited from the lottery. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) said, we are talking about small projects: village halls that have received money for new roofs; community groups that have received money for new minibuses; sports clubs that have received money for new equipment; and brass bands that have received money for new musical instruments. None of that has been to fulfil an election pledge or take forward a political agenda; it has been the public's money, without political strings attached. How shameful and narrowly partisan that the Government should put that at risk.

Even worse, the Government's contempt for parliamentary authority is such that they have not even waited for the Bill to become law, so eager were they to get their hands on lottery money for their own purposes. They started to set money aside for the New Opportunities Fund last October, even though they had no power to do so under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. In that regard, would the Secretary of State care to publish the voluntary agreements that he made with distribution bodies with respect to the "shadow" accounts?

What the Government have done is unlawful. The Bill includes provisions to amend the 1993 Act retrospectively to legitimise what the Government have done, but make no mistake: in their rush to get their hands on lottery money, the Government have clearly acted outside the law. Conservative Members have noted the Secretary of State's irritation on that point and his attempts to brush off criticism that what he is doing is illegal and that the retrospective provisions in the Bill are oppressive. I challenge the Secretary of State to come up with a comparable precedent for that retrospective action. He failed to do so today.

The Government have made great play of the idea that their proposals are endorsed by the people. I wish to make two points on that. First, the plan to deprive the original good causes of some of their percentage share of the lottery pot is not a manifesto commitment. Labour's manifesto commitment was to create the Government's health, education and environment fund to replace the Millennium Commission only when that body had been wound up. So much for the credibility of the manifesto.

Secondly, the notion that the Government's proposals have been endorsed in their consultation exercise is patently absurd. I urge hon. Members to look at the Government's analysis of the consultation exercise. It is not the people who have endorsed their proposals but the organisations that stand to benefit from them. Most of them are Government agencies and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) said, 496 of the 588 responses received in the consultation process came from local authorities, schools, campaigning and professional groups, which all stand to gain from the Government's proposals. Only 92 responses were from individuals. More than five times as many were from organisations with an actual and direct interest in the lottery.

Even those who stand to gain from the Government's proposals are under no illusions; the Government are using the lottery to replace taxation and to implement their agenda.

Mr. Lansley: While my hon. Friend is recalling the Labour party's manifesto promises, does he agree that Labour also made great play of seeking out a not-for-profit operator? The Government now propose to rest on the 1993 Act, which places on the director general an obligation to maximise the sums paid to good causes, but whether or not the operator is profit making is not a relevant consideration under the Act.

Mr. Spring: As my hon. Friend has pointed out, the Government have been all over the place on this issue. It is critical that the maximum amount goes to good causes. That is the essential point at issue.

The organisations that have looked at the proposals rebutted the Government's claim that the original good causes will get the money that they expected. The White Paper's explanation that the allocation of money to the New Opportunities Fund and NESTA would not involve any change to the original funding expectations of the existing good causes left many sceptical. They pointed out that the existing good causes have adjusted their programmes to take account of the increased lottery revenue. And what of possible lottery fatigue?

[Mr. Spring]

The Government are making possible the Treasury annexation of the lottery—by the sprinkling of a range of powers throughout the Bill—to bring under the direct control of the Secretary of State the existing good causes and the new bodies that the Bill will set up. The special order-making power in the Bill is designed to allow the Secretary of State to use the New Opportunities Fund to pay for Labour manifesto pledges. A similar degree of control will exist in relation to the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, which the Bill proposes.

It is characteristic of the mania for control by the Government that the Secretary of State will be able to hire and fire the board members of NESTA. He will have the power to set its objectives and to dictate how they should be met. He will have the power to interfere in how the organisation is run, and, of course, he will control the purse strings. The Government plan to place a duty on NESTA to seek gifts of assistance, money and land from other organisations.

Mr. Maclennan: Is not the hon. Gentleman using somewhat hyperbolic language in talking about the mania of control, bearing in mind the fact that it was his party which decided that the Millennium Commission should be chaired by one of its own Ministers? When the former Secretary of State for National Heritage gave money directly to the English National Opera, for the Coliseum, on the eve of an election, nobody described the Government as exercising a mania of control.

Mr. Spring: That situation was temporary, and the members were independent. There is no doubt about that.

Labour's pre-election document claims that NESTA will turn bright ideas into successful and innovative businesses. NESTA is the bright idea that has been turned into something all too familiar. In 1996, the Secretary of State for National Heritage announced that the rules governing the distribution of lottery money would be changed to allow lottery distributors to support the careers of talented sportsmen and artists. That is the genesis for NESTA. Sadly, NESTA will effectively simply be another arm of government, with a remit to regenerate Britain's industrial base. As such, it is another example of the subversion of the lottery to purposes other than those for which it was set up.

Much of the Bill reflects the diminishing credibility of the Secretary of State. What happened to all those newspaper reports of £80 million in the Budget to guarantee free access to museums? How much was it in the end? Was it £80 million? Was it £40 million? Was it £20 million? No, it was a pathetic £2 million, supplemented by money raided from the lottery, and it was the clearest possible indication that the Secretary of State has no departmental credibility with the Chancellor whatever.

In November, the Chancellor announced that our net payments to the EU would be some £400 million lower than budgeted. Not a penny of that was the Secretary of State able to secure for his Department. Regrettably, time and again it has been the lottery which has had to ride to his Department's rescue, not his powers of persuasion.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) said, we are asked to authorise a Treasury-inspired £1 billion raid on the national lottery. The Bill is plainly for party political exploitation: to use lottery money for what should be core funding activities by the Government. It gives unprecedented powers of control and interference to the right hon. Gentleman.

The blunt truth is simply this: the Bill is the thin end of the wedge. If it becomes law, it will undoubtedly lead to a rake's progress of taking money from good causes to prop up the Government's political objectives. It deserves the total contempt of the House.

9.39 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I thank all who have taken part in tonight's spirited debate.

Let me say to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) that, although he is a real smoothie, he is absolutely wrong. I accept that I have not yet completed my odyssey from the snug to the pantheon of world leadership, but if I complete it tonight, I do not want anyone—luvvies or no—to celebrate my metamorphosis with foie gras. I think that it is cruel and beastly, and I would rather die than touch it. *[Interruption.]* Only if I had the hon. Gentleman's company.

The idea that the shadow accounts are illegal is ridiculous. The hon. Member for West Suffolk must know that the Secretary of State could not possibly have been allowed to include in a Bill something that was illegal. If he still thinks that it is illegal, let him go to the courts and seek a judicial review of the Secretary of State's action—but I suspect that he would not be able to do that.

I welcomed the introduction of the lottery. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble)—and unlike my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) and for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), shame on them—I have not missed a week since the start of the lottery. I must say, however, that I am still waiting to win the big fat one. I hope that, when that happens, hon. Members will be able to share my delight. There will be street parties in West Ham, and money will be paid to the animal welfare movement and the Labour party before I clear off to Benidorm, or some other suitably tasteful resort, in order to drink pina coladas all day.

Mr. Grant: I do not wish to tax my hon. Friend unnecessarily; I know that he has a lot on his mind. Does he recall, however, that when we were in opposition he told the then Minister—I think it was Iain Sproat—that he wanted the lottery first prize to be extended and increased by some four or five times? Is he still of that mind, and will he confirm that he has been playing the lottery regularly in the hope of winning the big one?

Mr. Banks: In the words of Henry V, I know you not, old man. Of course I have not changed my position, and it is unfair to suggest that I have. Let me tell my hon. Friend what that was about. It was about the question of stopping the roll-overs. Many people said that the roll-overs should not be allowed to become so large, for the simple reason that people would not be able to handle the money. I remember saying at the time, "Give me the opportunity of handling a great big fat roll-over, and I will show you what you can do with it." In the circumstances, I think my hon. Friend must accept that I have not changed my stance.

Conservative Members have ignored the real benefits for ordinary people that the Bill will introduce. The sixth new good cause, which will benefit from the New Opportunities Fund, will not siphon money from the lottery; the money will have come through the second weekly draw. Existing good causes will receive the money—£1.8 billion—that they were led to expect within the licence period. *[Interruption.]* No, as a matter of fact I was not writing my speech. I was put off by the glasses of the hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames). I do not know why; perhaps it is something to do with the fact that he seems to have borrowed them from Dame Edna Everage.

The Bill takes a strategic overview of the lottery, which is what is needed. A lot of people have said that we should pay tribute to Camelot. I think that we should pay tribute to the propensity of people in this country to gamble. However, criticisms have been made by hon. Members. I have received 268 letters from hon. Members on both sides of the House, complaining that a lottery grant has not been given to a particular project in their constituency or asking why their area had not received more. Hon. Members know that there are imbalances, but the Bill will change the way in which things are done.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) mentioned not-for-profit operators. The Government remain committed to improving the system of operation for the lottery and to ensuring the greatest possible return to the good causes. A not-for-profit operator is one way of achieving that, and if such a bid came forward, we would welcome it. There is no question of our retreating from our election commitments on the matter. The Bill does not contain a clause that explicitly provides for a not-for-profit operator because existing legislation allows for it.

Mr. Maude: We could have told the Minister that.

Mr. Banks: I do not have to ask the right hon. Gentleman; there is nothing useful that he could tell me.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) mentioned my feelings on additionality and read out my remarks absolutely correctly. I said that lottery money should not be used to replace mainstream Government money, which remains the case.

Mr. Spring: That is sophistry.

Mr. Banks: It is not sophistry; they are carefully crafted words. If the Government used lottery money instead of spending a block of public expenditure, we would be breaching additionality rules, which we are not prepared to do—there is no question of our replacing mainstream Government money.

I have studied the grants to the constituency of the right hon. Member for Horsham—they are good. Worth Abbey lay community is providing a week-long programme of residential counselling and support for teenagers who are in crisis because of alcohol or drug misuse. The grant is provided over two years, which is perfectly okay. But one could argue that it should be provided by central Government funding; it is not being provided by central Government funding, so it is right that—

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Banks: Hang on, I have not finished. The right hon. Gentleman has made his speech, nipped out for a jolly good dinner and returned to the Chamber to interfere with me, in a manner of speaking.

Mr. Maude: You should be so lucky.

Mr. Banks: The right hon. Gentleman should be so lucky.

The information shop for young people in Horsham, which provides an outreach service for rural areas and neighbouring towns, has no existing provision, but the grant is paid over three years and covers salaries. A day centre provides specialised leisure opportunities for disabled children and adults. We could all argue that central Government should pay for such things, but they do not. Our Bill will ensure that such services can be provided.

Mr. Maude: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the last thing in my mind is to interfere with him.

The Prime Minister's own words set out the criteria for the lottery. He said:

"We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities."

If they are the Government's responsibilities, they should not be paid for by the lottery. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that such matters are the responsibility of central Government, they should be paid for by central Government funding.

Mr. Banks: We know that lottery money has been spent where an element of funding is provided by central Government; we are not replacing current central Government expenditure with lottery money, which Conservative Members clearly have not understood or have deliberately or mischievously ignored.

The right hon. Member for Horsham mentioned the arm's-length principle for NESTA. We have struck a balance between ensuring that NESTA is properly accountable for its use of a large sum of public lottery funding and giving it the freedom to determine its own policies. Those two principles have been identified for NESTA since the beginning. The Bill sets the remit for NESTA, but leaves the delivery of its programmes to it. The Secretary of State has no power to direct NESTA's policies; he can change its objects, but only at its request. The idea that a commissar wearing jackboots will tell NESTA what it must do is simply nonsense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) spoke far more sense in his speech than Conservative Members did in all their speeches. He gave his full support for the lottery when it was established and has done a great deal for sport in this country. I compliment him on his work as chairman of the Football Trust. He asked about lottery funds for sport and about a watering down of the commitment. He wanted to know what will happen after 2001 and whether sport will be made a permanent good cause. Nothing in the Bill or

[Mr. Banks]

in the original legislation gives any indication of that, but I would find it wholly strange and quite remarkable if, after 2001, we did not continue to fund the existing good causes, particularly sport. *[Interruption.]* I would love to be able to give a commitment. I may be a Minister, but the right hon. Member for Horsham must know by now that I cannot bind a future Parliament. I cannot say what Parliaments or Governments will do in the future, even those in the long-distance future that may be formed by Conservative Members. I would find it remarkable and unacceptable if sport was not a long-term beneficiary of lottery funds.

The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made a very good speech. The Secretary of State said so, and he meant it. We pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution to the establishment of the lottery. I am sure that he would pay tribute to Labour Members who supported his proposals when we were in opposition. However, I was intrigued about where the hell he went after he made his speech. He kept enticing me into thinking that there was a special event to which I was not invited. I have spent all evening trying to work out where he was. He said that it was a great event. According to tonight's *Evening Standard*, Huntingdon train spotters held their annual tupperware party at the Neasden Happy Eater, so that is where he must have been all evening. I hope that he had a jolly good time.

When the right hon. Member spoke, I felt that I had dropped into a time warp in which spinsters were cycling to church and we were all drinking warm beer while listening to the gentle smack of leather on willow. That is what he used to talk about. Like me, the right hon. Gentleman lived in Brixton. Where on earth did that take place in Brixton? I certainly do not remember it.

The right hon. Gentleman rightly said that the lottery should evolve. The Bill is about evolution not revolution: after all, this is new Labour. Under the circumstances, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that the Bill is in conformity with the proposals that he made in the original legislation. We have not siphoned off the money.

The right hon. Gentleman asked specific questions about the anticipated £10 billion, although it may be more than that according to the projections. I cannot say what will happen to the excess if the figure is over £10 billion. All I can say is that, as long as I am Minister for Sport, I will fight for a fair share of that extra money for sports. *[Interruption.]* I will be the Minister for a lot longer than that. That is the best I can do, and there is no point bothering with those who ask what would happen if there is less than £10 billion.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the guaranteed percentages for good causes. No changes are proposed in this legislation other than a reduction from 20 per cent. to 16⅔ per cent. for four of the existing good causes. However, we are dealing with a much larger pot. I have said that none of the existing good causes will get any less money than they were led to expect over the Camelot licence period. Opposition Members are trying to stir up problems that do not exist. The costs of the new set-up will be borne by the New Opportunities Fund. *[Interruption.]*

I am being specific in my replies. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon asked about further endowments to NESTA. There will be no further endowments in the current period of the lottery. He spoke about what he would have done if he were still Prime Minister, and rightly said that he would have sought to put more money into sports and arts coaching. The right hon. Member for Horsham accused us of wanting to do that and said that it was a breach of the additionality principle. However, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon has said that if he were in government he would have breached that principle. I do not think that we would have revolted against such a proposition because in many ways the determination of additionality is becoming metaphysical.

Mr. Maude: The Minister is on page 8.

Mr. Banks: I took notes during the debate and I would like to have more time to reply. I listened carefully to every speech, and I shall write to those hon. Members to whom I am not able to reply now. There is not much opportunity in a winding-up speech to do credit to all those who have spoken.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) said that he was agnostic about the Bill as a whole, and that he would not vote for it or against it. That reminded me of the man who sat on the fence waiting for the iron to enter his soul. The right hon. Gentleman warned about raiding the lottery to fund essential services and said that it would be better to raise direct taxation. In fairness, the right hon. Gentleman said that during the election campaign, which was one of the reasons why the Liberal Democrats did not do particularly well. There is no question of raiding the lottery for essential services. That is emotive language.

My hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) spoke about the gymnastic centre in Coleford. It gave me great pleasure to open that centre. My hon. Friend spoke about an issue that many hon. Members have mentioned—the way in which the lottery has been able to fund small but significant projects within constituencies.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) said that the lottery has been a remarkable success. As I have said, that probably has more to do with the propensity of people in this country to gamble than with the foresight of the proposals. The right hon. Lady mentioned the Churchill papers. That issue still rankles. If the national heritage memorial fund can spend £13.2 million on those papers it can certainly buy the Bobby Moore collection of England caps and medals and his 1966 World cup medal. I had better not say any more about that because we are debating the arm's length principle.

There is much that I could mention, but I should like to refer to a speech that shone out—that by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). He reminded me of a character in a Bateman cartoon—"The man who did not like the lottery." I respect the hon. Gentleman's controversial views, but they ran against the views of hon. Members throughout the House. Even those who do not do the lottery said that they benefit from it and that it is good.

The hon. Member for Gosport spoke about money being spent by people who could ill afford it and said that sales were busiest in areas where people are poorest.

That is true, and it certainly applies to areas such as West Ham, but if it was not the lottery it would be bingo, horse racing or greyhound racing at the betting shop, or fruit machines. None of the profits from any of those activities come to West Ham or to any constituency. Although I agree that, in terms of the percentage of their disposable incomes, poorer people have a greater propensity to play the lottery, at least they know that they get something back and that not all the profits are creamed off by the bookies. I must also mention that the hon. Gentleman is an 'underwriter for Lloyd's—is not that a form of gambling? It might be a sophisticated form of gambling, but it is gambling, so I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can afford to get too pious.

There is a lot more that could be said, and a lot more that will be said in Committee, but, for the moment, I rest my case. The Bill is a wonderful improvement on a very good lottery, and I urge the House to give it a Second Reading.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 135.

Division No. 246] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan

Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sloate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McFall and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

NATIONAL LOTTERY BILL [*LORDS*] [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the National Lottery Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure of the Director General of the National Lottery which is attributable to the Act;

(b) any expenditure of the National Lottery Commission established by the Act; and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment; and

(2) the making of payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 14.

Division No. 247] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold

Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McFall and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Amess, David
Butterfill, John
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Faber, David
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Loughton, Tim

May, Mrs Theresa
Robertson, Laurence (Tewk'b'ry)
Syms, Robert
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Owen Paterson and Mr. Dominic Grieve.

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

That the Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 911) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Green Belt Land (Harborough)

10.24 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I beg leave to present a petition promoted and organised by Dr. Kevin Feltham of Kibworth Harcourt and signed by almost 2,000 residents of the parishes of Kibworth Beauchamp, Kibworth Harcourt and Smeeton Westerby in the Harborough constituency, expressing concern about the threat of large-scale new development in the green belt and countryside.

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of Harborough declares that we are concerned about the decisions to sanction plans for new development throughout the countryside.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that more homes are built in city areas instead of the countryside or green belt, to breathe new life into our cities and to protect valuable countryside for future generations.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Benefits Agency (Tayside)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

10.25 pm

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth): I want to make it clear at the outset that the centralisation of social fund operations in Tayside is part of an overall trend in the Department of Social Security to centralise services in order to generate efficiency. I am aware that the problem is not particular to Tayside, but may be occurring elsewhere.

The sale of Benefits Agency estates is resulting in a sharp reduction in the number of local offices—around a third are to be shut immediately. The Department will rely more on call centres and less on local offices to provide services. Area directorates are responsible for allocating service provision, so the degree of centralisation will vary across the country. I understand that there were plans in Wales a year and a half ago to centralise all the benefit services and close all the local offices; those plans, no doubt thankfully for the Welsh, were abandoned.

My particular concern this evening is the situation in Tayside, which affects my constituents among others. I recently received a letter from the Benefits Agency, Tayside district, informing me that, as of 2 March, community care grants and budgeting loans are dealt with by the Arbroath agency; funeral and maternity payments are dealt with by the Dundee agency; and crisis loans and reviews continue to be processed at Perth, Dundee and Arbroath as before.

I am concerned that the Tayside agency's decision to centralise the way in which it deals with benefits will be a backward step, in terms of both the service provided to claimants and the working conditions of staff.

The letter that I received announcing the changes proudly proclaimed that the agency had carried them out to

"maximise efficiency by concentrating expertise in a given area".

It had apparently been done

"at no expense to our mutual customer and with the intention of providing an improved customer service",

but, frankly, I do not see how moving the people dealing with claims further away from the claimants can be described as an "improved customer service". That is a case of, "Whatever I say means the exact opposite."

Increasingly remote decision making results in a detachment from local conditions, and builds unnecessary barriers between the agency and the people it is supposed to serve. In the past month, we have seen a stark example of the dangers of depending on computers and ignoring the human side to benefit entitlement.

Under the winter payments scheme, pensioners living alone were to receive £20, and each person living in a household with more than one pension was to get £10. That situation, while not strictly relevant to this debate, underlines the problems caused when we forget that the Benefits Agency deals not with a series of entries in a computer but with real people.

If a claim is straightforward, there will not be a problem. The form can be completed, handed in to the local office and sent off for processing. I do not know how many hon. Members have had personal dealings with

the benefits system, but I am sure that they have all shared my experience in occasionally having to take up the cases of more than one constituent with the agency. That is not necessarily a criticism of the Benefits Agency, but a recognition that personal problems do not always fit the standard presumed in the forms that it produces. Nor are the forms always straightforward to complete.

A significant number of claimants will want—indeed. need—assistance with their applications. Take one of my constituents in Perth, who needed to speak directly to the person dealing with their claim for a community care grant or a budgeting loan. Instead of going to the local office, that would now involve at the very least a telephone call. Increasing dependence by the Benefits Agency on telephone contact favours the young, the educated and the articulate against the poor and the disadvantaged. Many claimants do not have telephones, and have to call from phone boxes armed with pockets full of change.

What about people who can at present in a face-to-face interview get more general advice by speaking to someone in the benefits office, who will, I hope, be sympathetic, knowledgeable and able to guide them in the correct direction? What about people who cannot afford to keep feeding money into a call box as they sit on hold, waiting for someone to find their files? If claimants are dissatisfied with how their claims are handled, they should have the opportunity to discuss it face to face with the person who decided it. In the case of community care grants or budgeting loans for someone in Perth, that would now mean a journey to Arbroath.

I am not talking about a small inconvenience. Someone from Crieff, the second biggest centre of population in my constituency, who wanted to sit down with the person dealing with their application, would in the past have had to come to Perth. That would have involved a bus journey and some expense and nuisance. Obviously, it would be better if there were an office in Crieff, but that is a piece of cake compared with the lengths that my constituent would now have to go to. On top of the 17 miles from Crieff to Perth, they would have to travel the extra 40-odd miles to Arbroath, a round trip of 120 miles.

Instead of one bus journey of 40 minutes on an hourly service, the trip involves changing at Perth, walking past the Perth Benefits Agency office to get from one bus stop to another, and spending 70 minutes on the bus to Arbroath. To catch the first bus from Perth to Arbroath, one has to leave Crieff at 7.5 am, hang about Perth bus station for 45 minutes, and arrive in Arbroath at 9.40 am. Allowing an hour to get the problem sorted out, one would then rush to catch the 10.47 am back to Perth for midday, and rush through the centre of Perth to catch the 12.11 pm to get back to Crieff for 12.50 pm.

That is six hours in all, assuming no traffic hold-ups and that the problem was sorted out in under an hour. More significantly, instead of a return fare of £4.40, it would cost a whopping £11.20. Telephone or travel, either way my constituents have to spend more money than ever before chasing up benefits at the time that they are in most financial need.

We are talking about people who may be among the poorest in our society, those whom the welfare system is supposed to help, but we are making it ever more difficult for them to speak to the people who take decisions that could significantly affect their lives. I do not understand how, by any stretch of the imagination, that could constitute an improved service for my constituents. I mean no offence to my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh), who cannot be here tonight, or to the good people of Arbroath whom he represents, but why should my constituents be forced to trail all the way to Arbroath to get their benefits sorted out?

Again, with the benefits transferred to Dundee, I refuse to accept that the increased distances involved can in any way improve the service received by my constituents. With all the other things that people arranging a funeral have to cope with, do they really need the added hassle of a trip to Dundee? Surely we should look at ways of reducing rather than increasing the distances that expectant mothers have to travel to sort out their maternity payments.

As well as the effect on claimants, there is also an effect on staff, and I am concerned about the disruption and the inconvenience caused to staff by these changes. Perhaps from a long way away, the gap between a couple of dots on the map in Scotland may not look like an enormous distance, but the reality of transport infrastructure in areas such as mine and surrounding areas can make life very awkward for people working in the offices, as well as for claimants.

The union that represents the Benefits Agency staff is extremely concerned at the changes which are taking place. I am grateful to the Public and Commercial Services Union for its assistance in giving me the information for this debate tonight. I am keeping my speech as short as possible, because I want the Minister to address the issues and not simply repeat some of the clichés in the letter from the Benefits Agency.

So far as the staff are concerned, I can see how the decision could make some sense if it were looked at on a purely financial basis. However, as with the effect on claimants, we ought not to forget that we are dealing with real people and real responsibilities. A transfer to Arbroath for an employee of the Benefits Agency based in the office in Perth who specialises in community care and grants will affect all areas of his life, including child care arrangements and the travel costs involved in a transfer to an office which is some considerable distance from his home.

These changes in the operation of the Benefits Agency have raised genuine concerns about the future of those offices—such as the one that remains in Perth—which have not been identified as centres for any specific benefit. I have referred to the fact that one third of Benefits Agency offices are to be immediately shut. Will the Minister address those remaining offices which are now non-specialist centres? Will he give guarantees that, in future, a need to find more efficiency will not result in these non-specialist offices being closed, making life even more intolerable for my constituents? Effectively, if the Perth office goes, there will not be a Benefits Agency office in my constituency.

I can appreciate the desire to maximise efficiency within the Benefits Agency, but that drive to cut costs must never be at the expense of the service provided to claimants. I cannot remember this House taking a decision to change the ethos of public service to become a flawed parody of commercial values. Frankly, that is what seems to be happening.

[Ms Roseanna Cunningham]

I hope that the Minister will not simply repeat the nonsense about this being an "improved customer service." I hope that he will address the substantive problems raised by the reorganisation. At the very least, I hope that he will acknowledge that, instead of providing an improved customer service, closures disadvantage huge numbers of people.

10.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): The hon. Member for Perth (Ms Cunningham) has expressed concern about organisational changes in the Benefits Agency, particularly in terms of how she sees them affecting standards of service delivery in her constituency.

Let me begin by reassuring the hon. Lady that the Government are fully committed to achieving the highest standards of customer service. Indeed, we wasted no time after coming into office in defining and charting a new course for the delivery of social security services. In December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security launched the active modern service programme, which spells out clearly our aims for the quality of service that we want to see delivered.

The Benefits Agency constitutes the front line of service delivery for most of the Department's business. It will have a leading role to play in taking forward active modern service initiatives. However, active modern service is not simply about initiatives driven by the centre of the Department. It also sets out a framework within which local initiatives, innovation and efficiency improvements in quality and service delivery can thrive.

The Government have pledged to live within the spending plans that we inherited. Those plans require year-on-year improvements in administrative efficiency. The Benefits Agency, as the largest of all Whitehall agencies, has an administrative budget of almost £2.5 billion a year. It is incumbent on the Benefits Agency, therefore, to operate in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible, consistent with delivering requisite standards of customer service.

The Benefits Agency delivers its services mainly through its district offices. Each district office comprises several local offices. That is why, in this case, the main offices located at Dundee, Perth and Arbroath, as well as smaller offices at Blairgowrie, Forfar, Montrose and St. Andrews, all constitute a single district.

The grouping of individual offices into districts took place in 1991. Since then, some adjustments to the make-up of districts have taken place, but the creation of districts has enabled significant efficiency and customer service improvements to be achieved.

Those improvements have been made possible by the opportunities to rationalise operations and by taking advantage of improved telecommunications and information technology in Benefits Agency districts. For example, all offices in each district now have a single telecommunications network. Also, each office has access to the entire case load for the whole district. That means that a customer can call in person at any office in the district to make a claim or to seek advice on his or her individual benefits, or telephone a single number and speak to any member of staff at any office in the district, regarding their claim. That is the case throughout the country, including Perth.

Each year, the Benefits Agency takes steps to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Last week, publication of its business plan for 1998–99 was announced in the House. Several of the efficiency improvements planned are based on evidence not only of a successful reduction in operating costs, but of improvements in standards of customer service.

The hon. Lady specifically drew attention to the organisational changes to social fund work in Tayside district. The point at issue seems to be whether those changes have impacted adversely on customer services in the district. I have mentioned our wider strategy for delivering an active modern service. That aim cannot be achieved by preserving existing functions in existing locations when there is a clearly identified opportunity to improve the standards and quality of customer service, by reorganising the handling of the work load.

A more efficient and better-quality customer service is the motivation behind the centralisation, by application type, of social fund activities in Tayside. Were such centralisation plans to run counter to the aims of the active modern service programme, I would not countenance them. To ensure that those aims are met, I have laid down a series of criteria against which Benefits Agency managers must now test each proposal for change to service delivery. Those criteria require that such proposals should demonstrate, first, wider access to services by office interviews, post, telephone or home visits; secondly, improved quality of services, including handling, where possible, an integrated service at the point of contact; thirdly, a proper balance between the needs of staff and changing the policy of operational needs; and fourthly, improved efficiency in the handling of customer claims and inquiries.

I am satisfied that the centralisation of funeral and maternity payments at Dundee, and of community care grants and budgeting loans at Arbroath, satisfies those criteria.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: Is the Minister effectively saying that there will be no requirement for people to make a round trip of more than 100 miles on any occasion, or is he saying that, if they have to do so, he considers that appropriate?

Mr. Bradley: I have made it clear that the processing of claims has been centralised, but that access to information and advice can be obtained at any office, as integrated information on each case is available. That overcomes the fear that the hon. Lady has identified and highlighted in her press releases, about people having to travel to get that information. That is not the case.

As I was saying, rather than spreading staff across three locations and expecting them to deal with all types of applications, there is now a pool of expertise—which will continue to grow—in relevant subject areas in the locations where each part of the work is now based. Customers will benefit from the expertise of staff in dedicated processing centres. That will mean improved speed, accuracy and quality of decision making. I repeat that advice on all aspects of the benefits system may still be obtained from any one of the offices concerned.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): My constituency borders that of my hon. Friend, and claimants from my

constituency also deal with the Perth office. Is the Minister confident that, if claims for social fund payments are to be administered from Arbroath, my constituents who go to the Perth office will be met by staff members with sufficient competence to handle their inquiry? Our experience of initiatives such as the benefit integrity project, for example, suggests that not all Benefits Agency staff are trained to the requisite level and can deliver the quality of service to which I recognise the Minister aspires.

Mr. Bradley: If your constituents' case files are held within the district of Tayside, the access that I have identified will be available to your constituents as well as to those of the hon. Member for Perth. I clearly cannot comment on the wider implications for your constituency—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The Minister is not referring to my constituents.

Mr. Bradley: The hon. Gentleman may wish to write to me about the part of his constituency that is not covered by Tayside district.

Mr. Swinney *rose—*

Mr. Bradley: I have answered the question, and I must make progress.

As I have said, customers will benefit from the new arrangement, and queries on any particular claim or application can be dealt with locally. There will be no need whatever for any customer to travel further than the office nearest to him. Alternatively, a telephone call to any office will be sufficient for the customer to be put through to the person dealing with his or her case, regardless of where that person is located.

Social fund application forms will continue to be available from each office. Customers can then choose whether to hand them back to the office nearest to them or send them directly to the office nominated for that particular type of application for immediate processing. All three offices will still deal with crisis loan applications and reviews. All reviews, of whatever type, will continue to be conducted by personal interview at each of the three main offices or, where necessary, by home visit.

Funeral and maternity payment claim forms are available from all offices and can be handed or sent back to any one office. Specialist adjudication and processing of those claims—which amount to a comparatively low number—will then be undertaken at Dundee and decisions notified accordingly. I can therefore reassure the hon. Member for Perth that there will be no diminution whatever of customer service as a result of the changes—in fact, quite the contrary.

The changes have not been introduced on a whim: they are consistent with a tried and tested approach to improving social fund service delivery across the country. Some 111 districts out of a total of 129 have organised their social fund operations in this, or a similar, way. However, I recognise from what I have been told about the handling of particular changes that more should have been done to consult relevant Members of Parliament—including the hon. Lady—and other interested parties. Notwithstanding the fact that none of the local welfare agencies has expressed concern about the changes, I regret that appropriate consultation was not carried out and that the hon. Lady did not have a proper opportunity to make her representations before the changes took place. I hope that she will be reassured to know that I have instructed Benefits Agency officials to undertake the fullest possible consultation before any similar organisational changes affecting service delivery take place in future.

I can also reassure the hon. Lady that, contrary to what she said, no members of staff have had to transfer from one office to another, although three people have moved offices at their own request. Staff levels in each of the importing offices were already sufficient to cope with the net changes in work load. Where the changes have resulted in fewer staff being required on social fund work, those reductions are being dealt with through redeployment to other duties or through natural wastage.

I reiterate the Government's commitment to high-quality standards of social security service delivery and confirm, once again, that the changes in Tayside have been designed with exactly that aim in mind. The changes will not, as the hon. Lady suggested, reduce standards of customer service. Instead, they will bring about real improvements in how the social fund is administered in Tayside district and in the quality of customer service that her constituents will receive.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 8 April 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Easter)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Madam Speaker: Before I call the first hon. Member to speak, I remind the House that a great many hon. Members want to participate in the Adjournment debate—I ask all hon. Members to bear that in mind.

9.34 am

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I believe that I am pushing at an open door on this matter, but I still think it worth putting on the record. In a recent article by Lucy Ward in *The Guardian*, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health spoke about the problem of chlamydia and the devastating effects that the disease can have on women's lives. More recently, my local branch of the British Medical Association raised the matter with me, asking whether the Government would introduce a screening programme.

Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United Kingdom, and nearly 40,000 cases are reported every year at clinics in England. Even more alarming is the fact that the disease is extremely prevalent among young women under the age of 25—the infection affects both sexes, of course, but the real damage is done to women.

The symptoms, when they are evident, manifest themselves as inflammation of the cervix. However, the problems are not usually evident—chlamydia is a silent infection, which does tremendous damage. If it is untreated, it can spread and damage the fallopian tubes, which can lead to infertility and, more seriously, to ectopic pregnancies—the fertilised egg lodges in the fallopian tube, which can be life-threatening after a few weeks.

My concern is not only that the condition is so easily treatable—a course of antibiotics over seven days could get rid of it—but that there is so much ignorance about it. Given the number of cases that are presented at clinics, no educational programme seems to have had any effect.

I ask the Government—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health has said that she wants to do this—to ensure that women are screened, in a procedure similar to the one for cervical cancer, at family planning clinics and doctors' surgeries throughout the country. As the condition is preventable, advice should be readily available to women and the procedure should be accessible. The Government must accept that screening must be backed by extra funding, as the cost could not be borne by current budgets.

Professionals and politicians have become increasingly aware of the damage that chlamydia can do to women. The chief medical officer has convened a working party on the subject, which I believe is due to report in a few weeks. It is widely rumoured that it will recommend routine screening of those under 25, but I want screening to be offered to all women who may be at risk. That would be most welcome, even as a pilot scheme—evidence from schemes in America and Sweden shows that screening is effective.

I should also welcome a good education programme about chlamydia—it is important that young people in schools should have proper information. There would be cost benefits. Given the growing incidence of infertility and the high cost of in vitro fertilisation treatment—to say nothing of the complete misery that couples face when they find that they cannot produce children, and, usually, that they cannot receive IVF treatment on the national health service—if the number of cases of chlamydia were reduced, the benefits would be twofold. I am asking my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Health to bring a report before the House very soon on their proposals for screening. When they do so, I think that they will receive the overwhelming support of the House.

9.39 am

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): First, I wish to refer to the BBC's decision to take away the broadcasting of "Yesterday in Parliament". The BBC is unique in the way in which it has access to free radio coverage. All the independent radio stations must pay a great deal of money for access to the wavelengths. It enjoys that free access by almost general agreement. If the BBC wants to have friends in the House, it must ensure that it continues to provide the public service that we have come to expect from it. I regret the decision that it has taken on "Yesterday in Parliament".

Secondly, an announcement was made yesterday by the Minister for Local Government and Housing. I have been in the House for a little while, and I know that Governments have the habit of slipping out news shortly before the House rises for a recess. The Government have shown that they are no different from previous Administrations. Yesterday, the Minister for Local Government and Housing sent a letter to all Derbyshire Members, telling us that the Deputy Prime Minister had announced his decision on council tax capping for 1998-99.

In her letter, the Minister tells us that Derbyshire county council is the only county to be designated for possible capping. I understand that the county council has 28 days in which to make representations to the Government before they come forward with an order.

It is ironic that this is the first time that the county council has been designated for possible capping. During the 18 years of Conservative government, it was never capped. It did some crazy things during that period, including increasing its rate on numerous occasions. Now we have new Labour, and a new Labour Government have designated Derbyshire for capping.

In the run-up to the general election, all the Labour candidates in Derbyshire were saying that the county would receive better treatment from a Labour Government. They claimed that it would be looked after, because somehow it had been unfairly treated in the past

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

by the Conservative Government. Alas, that seems not to have happened. When we debated this matter in February all the Derbyshire Members except me supported the Deputy Prime Minister's capping criteria. I suppose that we cannot complain now when we find that the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister for Local Government and Housing have decided to follow through with possible capping.

It annoys me intensely that the county council knew exactly what it was doing. Indeed, it was bragging. It issued press releases telling the people of Derbyshire that, if it was not allowed to break the cap, there would have to be specific cuts. It told us where the cuts would come. Incidentally, it has never singled out its public relations department for any cuts. Instead, it has referred to education and social services. It has issued many press releases, and I could refer to them, but I shall not do so out of courtesy to other hon. Members—I understand that we are under pressure of time. Undoubtedly we shall be able to return to this subject if the Government introduce an order.

The most sickening feature is that, a few weeks ago, the Government allocated to Derbyshire more than £1 million to reduce class sizes. That was hailed by the Prime Minister and Education Ministers as a great move forward for the county. However, it must be understood that the council tax re-billing of all the households in Derbyshire will cost more than £500,000. That money could have been used for the provision of services. It could have been used, for example, to continue to reduce class sizes, a move that we all welcome. I have no difficulty in welcoming the pressure that is being put on reducing class sizes.

The county council knew that there was a possibility of its being capped, and it now seems that the Government will impose a cap. Let us be clear that we are talking of the Government's capping criteria. Those criteria have nothing to do with anything inherited from the Conservative Government. Instead, we have new Labour's capping criteria. New Labour's judgment was announced yesterday by the Minister for Local Government and Housing.

In the hon. Lady's letter to me—I presume that it was sent to all Derbyshire Members—she writes:

"We are satisfied that on the basis of the information so far available to us the reduction is reasonable and achievable in all the circumstances of Derbyshire County Council."

Representatives of Derbyshire county council met the Minister, and, using the usual happy-clappy words that we get from the Government, she assured them that she understood their problems—she understood what they meant, and she had sympathy with them. However, when it came to the Government announcing their capping criteria, there was no sympathy whatsoever.

We are talking of the first full year when the Government can say that they are totally in control of local government spending. The only county council they are designating for possible capping is Derbyshire. As I have said, the re-billing of every household in the county will cost more than £500,000. That money could be better used in providing many services.

There are schools in my constituency, especially in Belper, which are overcrowded because of the large housing developments that have taken place in the area. It is against that background that the county council faces re-billing costs amounting to more than £500,000. If that money has to be spent, it will take longer to resolve some of the overcrowding problems, for example.

We have heard a great deal about the problems faced by the countryside. My constituency is an area of about 350 square miles. Within it is some of the most attractive scenery, without doubt, in the midlands. Indeed, it has some of the most attractive scenery in the United Kingdom. That underlines some of the problems that less-favoured farming areas are facing.

Our countryside is beautiful because it has been looked after by farmers for generations—not because of some accident. It is beautiful because of the way it has been managed and conserved. Unless the Government take some action, especially in some of the less-favoured areas, to give help and support to farmers, our beautiful countryside will not be there for future generations. These areas will not be cherished and well looked after as they have been so far.

The Government might say that some of the problems in the countryside have been inherited. That may be so, but the Government are the Government of the day. Therefore, they must take the action that is required to ensure that people in less-favoured areas can get a living from the countryside, thereby ensuring that it is available for future generations to enjoy.

Those are the points that I wish to raise before the House rises for the Easter recess. I could speak for much longer about Derbyshire county council, but I shall not do so because I know that there is a huge demand for speaking time in this debate.

9.49 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is a brave and incredibly foolhardy man who ignores the views of the Speaker of the House. The gentleman in charge of the BBC is taking his life in his hands. He seems to believe that the Radio 4 programmes that report Parliament are of so little importance that he can continue with his intended changes without apparently taking note of the views that you, Madam Speaker, expressed on behalf of Parliament.

The BBC is still—just—a public broadcasting system that is very much valued throughout the world, so it really pains me that it has decided, in an arbitrary and extraordinarily stupid way, to proceed with basic changes that will have a tremendous impact on the reporting of Parliament and all its functions. I got into terrible trouble the other day—which, considering what a mild and flexible woman I am, I find very hurtful—when I suggested that this was a failure in the BBC's duty. One of the Lobby correspondents then suggested that anybody who got so much publicity for Pooh was not a woman to be treated seriously, but I do work reasonably hard in this establishment.

The BBC seems to be ignoring one of the most important functions of public broadcasting: to allow listeners to make up their own minds about what they hear. I am sure that it is easy for the best journalists in the world to interpret what Members of Parliament say, both in the Chamber and in Select Committees, but from my own experience, occasionally their interpretation is not accurate. Occasionally they go for the superficial. They do not have sufficient time in their programmes to

look in depth at what is really happening in Parliament, so their reporting is no substitute for what Members say and for what Select Committees and the other aspects of Parliament do.

I have looked carefully at all the arguments made by Radio 4 for the changes, particularly to programmes such as "Yesterday in Parliament", and some of the arguments are pretty puerile. In fact they are fairly insulting. The current audience for "Yesterday in Parliament" at 8.45 am is 1.3 million. That is more than the audience for "Newsnight", although nobody is saying that.

The audience will be reduced by a third or a half if the programme is shifted to long wave. I, for example, have to use an old radio to get long wave. When I am in London, I live in the centre of the city. I cannot pick up a clear programme on long wave on the existing apparatus I have, and I see no reason to buy another old radio to please the BBC. I cannot be unique: there must be others who suffer in precisely the same way.

Even BBC managers say that only a third of the Radio 4 audience listens on long wave. If that is true, there will be a massive loss of information to important segments of the community. We are talking about 650,000 listeners a day, not just friends of Members of Parliament, but large numbers of the general public.

I have a particular interest in this as a Chairman of a Select Committee. I happen to think that one of the really useful things that Parliament has done is set up Select Committees, which are effective, which take evidence, produce detailed reports and offer advice to the House of Commons and, coincidentally, the Government, about what is important. It is extraordinary that the detailed programme "In Committee" will be scrapped altogether, to be replaced by "The Westminster Hour", which will have a totally different political brief—we know what that will be.

We have lots of exciting, amusing and interesting people in this place, but they may not all get on "The Westminster Hour", incredible though that may seem. Perhaps some of the reporting will be fairly superficial. Perhaps—dare one say it?—more time will be given to subjects that journalists regard as important but the public do not.

I have a sad example of that. Last night, I listened to the late evening bulletin of Independent Radio News, which I remember as a remarkable service in the past, and two of the biggest items were, first, the adultery of an Army officer—I am sure it was fascinating to him, but it was astonishingly boring to me—and, secondly, the fact that someone had returned to his wife.

Well, good. We are all for the family. It is nice that people return to their wives—although there are occasions when wives do not want them back—but, frankly, the idea that that is news is embarrassing. It assumes that the whole world consists of people who have an attention span of two and a half seconds, and are basically idiots.

Of course, there are people who vote for the Conservative party, so there may be a number of idiots in the population, but the reality is that we must treat the people of the United Kingdom seriously. We must assume that they want to know what their elected Parliament is doing. That is what democracy is about. Once people do not know what we do here, at any level, we are in grave danger, because they will be entirely reliant on other people's interpretation.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Perhaps I can point out another specious argument used by the chairman of the BBC: because the majority of Members of Parliament have not issued their own personal protest about these changes, he assumes that they are happy with them. Does the hon. Lady agree that the fact that our own Speaker has made representations, and that all the expressions of opinion are entirely in accord with what the hon. Lady has said this morning, gives the lie to that fact?

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is astonishing that the chairman of the BBC should be so ill informed, and that he assumes that the Speaker does not speak for the House of Commons. For whom does Madam Speaker speak? She speaks not only for the Chairman of the Select Committee concerned, but for us, firmly and loudly. I have never heard of anyone ignoring the representations that Madam Speaker makes. She made a clear statement that the BBC is probably failing in its public duty.

I am not altogether surprised that Sir Christopher Bland finds it difficult to understand that, because the only time that I complained to him, he did not answer my letter. He sent it off to the producer about whom I was complaining, who wrote back and said that he was sorry that the programme "did not work" for me. If that is the level of the producers that the BBC has, perhaps we could get rid of quite a few of them and save a bit of money.

The reality is that, although BBC managers admitted privately that no audience research had identified the changes that they are pushing, some of the changes will materially alter the way in which people learn about Parliament and its doings. After all, laws carry with them sanctions. What we do here is not just decide where the odd Belisha beacon will go. We frame laws under which the United Kingdom will operate for many years to come.

What we do here carries with it sanctions against people's lives. What we do changes not only their health care and education, but the future of their relationships with other countries. It changes their role in employment. It changes every aspect of their lives. That is why there is a democratic Government. That is why many of us fight to get here. That is why we think it important that what we do should be represented.

I am desperately angry with the way in which the BBC is behaving, because I believe that the work it does in Committee, in its radio programmes, in its television programmes that seriously report Parliament, is so fundamental that it should not be under-valued. The BBC will lose a large number of listeners and viewers, and when it has got it all wrong, it will scrabble to try to get them back. We have seen that in changes to other programmes. We have seen the way in which audiences for other serious programmes have been decimated.

Although I value the programme "From Our Own Correspondent", I have not heard it since it was changed to a completely different time. It is not that I do not want to; it is because I cannot. It appears quite impossible for the BBC to understand that the decline in its viewing and listening figures may relate to the fact that people go to work. There are still some people who leave home between 8.30 am and 9.00 am, but that is such a revolutionary idea that it has not crossed the minds of the people who are taking these decisions.

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

I have always supported the BBC, but I find it increasingly difficult to do so. I have always believed that public service broadcasting is a jewel. I like it when I go to America and people tell me how lucky I am to have the BBC. Having worked in what are loosely called "the media", I like to hear people praise the BBC for what it has done in the past—but now I am very dispirited and angry about the BBC's arrogance and ignorance, and about the fact that it ignores what Members of Parliament say. The media think that what those nice people up in the Press Gallery have to say is much more important than what Members of Parliament are deciding and voting on. That is not just asinine stupidity: it is totally unacceptable.

Perhaps we could suggest one other change. I know that Lord Cocks of Hartcliffe was the only member of the governing body to vote against the changes. Perhaps we should offer our own views of possible changes for the future, and get rid of the chairman and governors, replacing them with sensible people who know what is going on. Perhaps we should do something to enable the general public to find out what Parliament really is, what it does, and above all what it represents—for that is wholly outwith the knowledge or instincts of the current governors of the BBC.

10 am

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I too would like to be associated with the remarks just made.

I am speaking on behalf of constituents of mine. When hon. Members do that, they nearly always want the Government to spend more money. I am not asking the Government to spend more money. Often, too, Members want special rules or conditions to be imposed to protect their constituents. I do not want that, either. Indeed, I seek the very opposite.

On other occasions, Members claim that the Government are doing nothing or have no sympathy for the cause that they have in mind. That is not why I am speaking this morning. I want to discuss an issue that requires no Government money and no special rules or exemptions; and it does not lack Government support at the moment. It concerns the European Union's provisional anti-dumping levy on unbleached cotton. The subject is perhaps not widely discussed by people sitting on buses, but in the community of Strines in my constituency, people do discuss it. Strines Textiles is a textile finishing firm which faces ruin as a result of the imposition of the levy.

The problem has not sprung up this morning or this year. We are now in the second cycle of this absurd process. The European Commission is taking steps to protect the textile industry across the EU—surely a laudable aim—but, unfortunately, what it has chosen to do is counter-productive and is destroying jobs in this and other EU countries.

The anti-dumping levy consists of the imposition of an additional duty or levy on unbleached cotton that is manufactured outside the EU and then imported to the EU for the use of textile finishers. Members will know that, in the past, the United Kingdom has had a proud and substantial textile industry which included all phases of production, from spinning right through to the finishing of fabrics. But changes inside the EU, and changes in the UK's textile industry, mean that there is now practically no weaving of raw cotton into material in the EU, and none at all in the United Kingdom.

So this levy, designed to protect the spinners and producers of what is called grey cloth or unbleached cotton, is completely unnecessary and counter-productive.

The European Commission has the power to introduce a provisional duty. It lasts for about six months, and is then subject to confirmation by the member states. Some two years ago, such a provisional duty was imposed, and was fought vigorously by the UK Government of the time—and by other EU Governments. In due course, the provisional levy was dropped.

Meanwhile, a disaster had already occurred. Raw material costs to the fabric finishing companies in the UK were raised by between 15 and 20 per cent. The intention behind the levy is that it should protect the producers of grey cloth inside the EU, and guarantee their market, but there are nothing like enough producers of grey cloth in the EU to fill the gap. The importing countries that were not subject to the levy promptly raised their prices by the amount of the levy anyway, so that all imported grey cloth immediately became more expensive in the EU by roughly the amount of the levy.

Therefore, external suppliers increased their prices to our finishing textile industry. The European weaving industry, such as it is, is incapable of filling the gap; and to make matters worse, some raw-cloth-weaving nations are also keen to develop their own textile finishing industries, and have taken the opportunity to set up their own trade—which, of course, can purchase the raw materials without having to pay the levy at all. Not only do they have lower labour costs, but they therefore have lower raw material costs.

The process has exposed the fact that, on this occasion, the European Commissioners have been unaware that the textile industry is a global market. Two years ago, before the first introduction of the provisional anti-dumping levy, Strines Textiles in my constituency employed 230 people. It had emerged from a management buyout some five years before, when it had been on the verge of closure, and had developed a range of specialist textile finishing products that go into the high fashion trade—and, incidentally, also into Ministry of Defence contracts.

The impact of the provisional anti-dumping levy on Strines's competitiveness meant that, by May of last year, the firm had shed more than half the work force, and was on the brink of closure. One of my first jobs on being elected was to raise the matter in the House and with the Department of Trade and Industry.

I have had support at every stage. The first anti-dumping levy was removed shortly before the general election. For the past six to nine months, the company has been gradually getting back on its feet with a cheap supply of imported materials; once again, it has been able to compete in the global market. Then, on 25 March this year, the EU Commissioners once again imposed the duty. That will be catastrophic for my constituents and their families, and for the work force and management of Strines.

If any hon. Member has a textile firm in his or her constituency which believes that the duty is a good thing, I should be glad if they got in touch with me. I can find no one in the textile trade in the UK who believes that the

imposition of the duty will do anything to protect the market or ensure the long-term survival of the industry in the EU.

The European Commission has argued that finishers such as Strines Textiles will be able to withstand the imposition of the levy because they are adding high value to the product, but the market is global and the technology is moving away from the European Union, so the impact will be counter-productive. *[Interruption.]* Contrary to what I hear from some Labour Members, I support the EU's work in protecting trade and industry, although I am a critic of this mechanism. The EU must take more account of individual nations and their industries. I emphasise that only five EU nations have agreed to the provisional levy—a minority voted in favour—but the levy will still be imposed.

I call on the Government to press the Commission as strongly as possible to abandon the provisional anti-dumping levy and to ensure during their presidency that the eight EU nations that joined us in opposing the provisional duty should be reinforced in their views, and encouraged to make them known to Commissioners. I hope that our presidency will be used to put in place guidelines that would make it impossible for Commissioners to impose a provisional duty when it would demonstrably cost jobs and damage the industry that they intend to protect.

Some workers at Strines Textiles are the fourth generation to work at the firm. They have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps twice in the past 10 years, and they are shattered to be on the brink of disaster once again—not because their product is bad, not because they are inefficient, not because their productivity is poor and not because their pricing is are wrong, but because someone is trying to help them. They say clearly, "Please stop helping us, because it is doing the damage."

I do not want money or special rules; on the contrary, we want a free, fair and open market, which would allow Strines Textiles to flourish.

10.12 am

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am most grateful to have been called to speak, and I want to raise on behalf of my constituents the consequences of a recent decision of the education committee of the county of Essex, which, at a meeting this week, determined that it would end home-to-school transport for students aged over 16. The change goes counter to the traditional support of all parties for home-to-school transport.

The proposal is that pupils who currently benefit from transport and those whose parents are on income support will continue so to do, but the remainder will not, and will have to find the fare to travel to sixth forms or to colleges. The decision is especially pernicious in a rural area. The people in the villages in my constituency do not have a sixth form to which they can walk or cycle, but have to travel to Braintree or another town where there is such a facility. For example, Coggeshall has a distinguished school, Honywood, which has a good reputation, but education finishes at 16. Students from Coggeshall will be obliged to buy tickets to travel to further their education.

This is a particularly unfortunate policy, because it penalises those who live in small towns, villages and rural areas, and those who are less well off than their fellows. There is a mosaic of discrimination: Witham, in my constituency, has sixth form education, and students there can carry on through the system without the burden of paying to travel, but parents of the Catholic faith would almost certainly send their children to the John Payne school in Chelmsford, which is many miles distant. The concession of free transport for over-16s will be ended, so the policy discriminates against those who send their children to denominational schools, which is especially hard on those from less well-off backgrounds.

Great play is made of countryside questions; indeed, one sometimes thinks that some hon. Members take the view that everyone in the countryside is pursuing the fox and finishing off with a supper of beef on the bone. However, other countryside matters cause great concern. We do not want the countryside to become a ghetto for the well-off or the weekender; we want a countryside where ordinary families can live, bring up their children and send them to schools at a cost they can afford.

I regret that Essex county council education committee has made this change, and it is strange that it has been made after the policy has been in place for so many decades. Those who are not intensely familiar with Essex may not know of recent developments in the county. The political balance has changed, not because hon. Members have overlooked a special county election, or because there have been a spate of by-election losses by the governing Liberal Democrat and Labour parties, or because there has been a mass defection from them to the Conservative party—but because the boroughs of Southend and Thurrock have been deleted from the historic county of Essex and granted unitary status. That action, which was taken at midnight on 31 March, changed the balance in the county. A consequence, I regret, has been the policy change that I have outlined.

I hope that Conservative Members will prevail upon their colleagues on Essex county council to consider whether the change will help poorer people and those who live in small towns and rural areas, and to reconsider the policy.

10.16 am

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): This is only the second time in 38 years that I have spoken in such an Adjournment debate. I divided the House last time, but the Lord President will be pleased to know that I do not intend to do so today.

Before I discuss the Bournemouth symphony orchestra, I must agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that hon. Members must make a greater demonstration of their condemnation of the way in which the BBC is treating the reporting of Parliament to the nation. The BBC appears to think that it is much more important than Parliament. In its decisions, it seems to be saying, "To hell with Parliament. We will decide how we report it, and Parliament will have no say." Perhaps it should think about what Members of Parliament will say when its grant comes up for discussion.

I condemn the way in which "Today in Parliament" and "Yesterday in Parliament" have become much more editorialised. Producers and commentators are interpreting what Parliament is saying rather than reporting what hon. Members themselves are saying, which is unacceptable.

Now for praise and condemnation: I praise the work of the Bournemouth symphony orchestra, especially in the west country, and its programme; and I condemn the fact

[Sir Peter Emery]

that Devon county council has seen fit to cut the grant of under £100,000 for the forthcoming year to nothing. There is considerable concern in my constituency. Although the orchestra does not play there, the problem affects Devon and, indeed, Cornwall. It appears that the Liberal-Democrat-controlled county council lacks an understanding of music and the arts, and the role they play in the lives of civilised people.

For more than 30 years, the Bournemouth symphony orchestra has provided the main professional music service for Devon and the south-west. It has given regular concerts, not just in the cities but in rural areas, and the sinfonietta has travelled to Teignmouth, north Devon, Ilfracombe, Honiton and many smaller areas. The county council's decision will destroy that at a stroke, and will deprive the population of the orchestra's work in general. The council made its decision without consulting the orchestra, the Arts Council or the districts, and its unilateral action has been rightly criticised.

The orchestra promotes a rolling programme. In good faith, and because of demanding lead time, it has entered into contracts for the future. It will have to adhere to those contracts, although it has no money to meet the cost of commitments in the county for 1998-99.

Activity in the county is supported by a tripartite funding arrangement between the county, the district and the Arts Council. The withdrawal of the grant puts the balancing factor from the Arts Council at risk, because it is provided on a shared basis. The county council does not seem to have taken its responsibility on board, and that has implications for the south-west as a whole.

The council seems to have ignored the fact that one of the orchestra's bases is the great hall of Exeter university has applied to the National Lottery Commission for a refurbishment grant, and its figures are based on the assumption that the orchestra will contribute to the hall's costs in future. As that contribution will not now be made, the lottery application is immediately at risk. The receipt of a special grant from the Arts Council out of its stabilisation fund is also at risk. There is a real danger that Devon and the south-west will be deprived entirely of the orchestra's activities.

Musical education will also be affected. Last year, the sinfonietta and members of the orchestra's staff held more than 80 teaching sessions in different schools, explaining the use of musical instruments and talking about music as an art form. That will now disappear overnight.

I appeal to the Lord President, who I know is a very generous person, to see whether she or the Government can take any action to help the orchestra. Perhaps she will ask the Liberal-Democrat-controlled county council to review its decision. It is not yet too late to act.

The orchestra is supported by a massive amount of voluntary work. I should have said at the outset that it is a registered charity. It receives a good deal of financial support from those who want to support music in the south-west. Perhaps the BBC will play its part by reporting part of my speech, and members of the public in the south-west may then send money to the orchestra—to Bournemouth, or to its headquarters in Poole.

The council's decision affects not just my constituency, but the arts and music in the south-west as a whole. If the services of the Bournemouth orchestra are lost, it will be a tragedy.

10.24 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me a chance to speak for two or three minutes about the proposed rate cap in Derbyshire, which was raised by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin).

It is strange to think that, when I was on the Labour party national executive with my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), we were on opposite sides of the fence: I was on the left, and she was on the right. Now my hon. Friend is old Labour. New Labour has moved to the right of old Labour, and she and I are now in roughly the same place. What a difference a day makes. No, I am not going to sing it.

My hon. Friend talked about the BBC. It is sad to think that, for all those years—day in, day out—all of us Labour Members, and probably some Conservative Members, supported the BBC. We told people how wonderful it was that we had a public sector broadcasting service. We cannot say that any more. The BBC is more concerned about paying Camelot than about doing the job that it is supposed to do. It has gone down market: there is no doubt of that.

Anyone who watches the news can see that standards are getting lower and lower. We used to be able to say that the BBC could lift its sights to the highest common factor; now it is a question of the lowest common denominator. Murdoch will be putting in a bid for it next. That is a crazy thought, but, given what is happening, it is conceivable. Those at the BBC ought to look at some of its old programmes—some of the transmissions of the past. They would then see that the BBC is unquestionably slipping further and further down market.

As I said, I want to talk about the proposed rate cap in Derbyshire. The situation is not exactly as the hon. Member for West Derbyshire described it, but he is a Tory Whip, and I expect him to do the job he has been sent to do. He is not here now, but I will say it anyway: he has to do his job.

Over the past 15 years or so, Derbyshire county council became a target, or scapegoat, for the Tory Government. There is no denying that. Tory Members used to urge Ministers on, saying, "Hammer Derbyshire." They used words like that. They wanted the Labour-controlled county council to suffer. They used to come here and make speeches—they are all in *Hansard*—calling on Ministers to do Derbyshire down.

Naturally, the Tory Ministers did that. It is bordering on hypocrisy for an hon. Member to come into the Chamber now and give the impression that he is worried about Derbyshire's ratepayers, when Tory Members called on the Government to cut its grants left, right and centre. The Government did cut the grants, and we estimate that we lost between £200 million and £250 million during those dismal years when the Tories were in power.

On one occasion, I came to the defence of the Labour-controlled county council, putting in for an Adjournment debate. I turned up at 11 pm or midnight, and suddenly the Adjournment debate was not like any normal Adjournment debate. Some hon. Members may remember that occasion. All the Derbyshire Tories were present—Edwina Currie and all the others who were defeated in the election, and the hon. Member for West Derbyshire. I was putting the case for the

Labour-controlled county council when Greg Knight, a Tory Member, raised a point of order and demanded this, that and the other.

Anyone who reads the *Hansard* report for that day will see that the Adjournment debate did not take place. Tory Members attack Labour Members for asking a few questions and being a bit awkward now and again, and the report of that debate is littered with points of order. I got out about three sentences in about half an hour. Because the Tories could not stop me, they called, "I spy strangers." That caused a 15-minute Division, and the Serjeant at Arms had to get them out of the Lobby. By the time they came back, the half hour was up. That was done because I had the temerity to speak on behalf of the Labour-controlled county council whose grants had been cut by the Tory Government year after year.

That *Hansard* makes good reading for anybody who wants to see what happened when Tory fanatics were determined to see that Derbyshire ratepayers did not get a fair crack of the whip. The county council was prepared to fight on behalf of miners during the strike. During the holidays, it decided to hand out food packages to the kids in miners' families, because, as the schools were off, the children could not get school meals. Such actions got up the noses of Tory Members, and we were subjected to attacks.

In the Government's second rate support grant initiative, they have said that they will make marginal changes. They have to stick, so they said, within Tory spending plans. That was a crazy idea. During the general election, we should not have got that round our necks. I did not get it round mine. It was a mistake, and we would have won the election handsomely without saying that. It has been a problem and the sooner we get away from it, the better.

The next Budget, the one in 1999, will be important, because on that day I hope that we will wean ourselves off Tory spending limits. In the meantime, the Government are saddled with the problem of that manifesto commitment. Wrong as it was, there it is, and the Government were able to make only marginal changes to the rate support grant. They were sensible changes, in that they shifted a little money from some of the posh areas such as Westminster, which had been chucking money away right, left and centre on this, that and the other. There was a marginal movement of money to some depressed areas, and especially to those in which pits had been shut.

There were shifts—not great, just marginal—in areas such as Lancashire, but Derbyshire did not benefit, because it is really two counties. On the western side, there is the beautiful peak district, with small industries. In general, it is an area of tiny villages—it could be Devon. The eastern side had the old coalfield, which has gone. It is not a question of some pits closing: every one has been closed.

We did not benefit from the new Labour Government's marginal changes to the rate support grant this year. As a result, we got the lowest settlement. On top of that, in some pit villages 30 to 40 per cent. of people are out of work. The settlement was not good enough. Derbyshire has more kids in classes than any other county. I accept that other hon. Members may be able to point to similar problems, but ours is the worst, and we must change that.

Against that background, would it not have made sense for the rate support grant to favour Derbyshire a little more? However, because of the new criteria, it did not quite measure up, so Derbyshire county council decided to go through the cap. It would have liked to go through by as much as £10 million, but it decided to be new Labour and to be careful, and it went to £3.9 million. The council thinks that it will just about scrape home with that extra money.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will stand in this afternoon for the Prime Minister, who is trying to pull off a big job in Northern Ireland. I hope that he succeeds: it is important that he does. He is doing his level best, but no doubt, if he fails, the BBC will blame him. It probably has the headline already.

The Deputy Prime Minister has been asked to issue a declaration about capping. I must put the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) right. It is a formality—at least I hope that that is all it is. That is what I have been told. I shall explain. According to law, a form is sent out, and, within 28 days, the county council and Labour Members such as me from Derbyshire will put the case for the extra £3.9 million. I am making a start now in case we are not heard loudly and for long enough. Requesting the issue of the notice is a formal matter.

I want people to understand that the ink is not yet dry, and that we have to battle to make sure that we get the extra £3.9 million. Someone has said, "What about Somerset?" It was capped last year: I know all about that—I was here. I did not support the Government that day, either. Warwickshire was also involved in the rate capping procedure, and then it disappeared. Derbyshire wants to be treated in the way that Warwickshire was treated last year. We do not want to be treated like Somerset—*[Interruption.]* This is not a laughing matter. We are debating teachers' jobs and class sizes, and the fundamental matters that bring Labour Members to Parliament.

Warwickshire came up with a package that enabled it to get through the cap, and it was dropped. Our amount is not as big as that of Warwickshire. It is £3.9 million, and I have reason to believe that Warwickshire went over £4 million. I want my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to pass that message to all those in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, so that, at the meeting within the next 28 days, we can get a settlement that will save ratepayers the extra £500,000 it will cost to send out the second phase of rate notices. That is the last thing we need.

It is necessary to put the record straight. We have reached the negotiating point, and the issue is getting crucial. We want success, and I want my right hon. Friend to make sure that the Cabinet and Ministers will take decisions that ensure that we do not have to face a rate-capping procedure over the next few weeks in Parliament. As no other authorities are involved, the Government will not even have to present an order.

10.38 am

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Some 15 hours ago in the House, I spoke about the millennium project in Portsmouth harbour, and my speech this morning also relates to that.

That project is an exciting one for the year 2000. I hope to be here in two years to invite every hon. Member to come to Portsmouth harbour to see the dramatic tower

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

on the Portsmouth side, and to visit the museums—the submarine museum, the Priddy's Hard museum, the interesting museum of naval medicine at the Royal hospital, Haslar, which should make us all grateful that we live in the 20th century and do not go to sea, and the Gosport museum.

The point of the millennium project at Portsmouth harbour is to show our naval and military heritage. It backs the local features of HMS Victory, HMS Warrior 1860—I declare an interest as a director of HMS Warrior 1860—and the Mary Rose, Henry VIII's magnificent ship. It is the artefacts relating to those military and naval museums that cause me concern.

Priddy's Hard museum has the best collection of torpedoes in the country. It has a Whitehead, a mark 8 torpedo, one of the type that sank the Belgrano, a type 46 torpedo and a Tigerfish torpedo; in fact, it has the full range of naval torpedoes. It also has a ship-based Exocet missile and a complete range of guns from Tudor cannons to Victorian guns, world wars one and two guns and later ships' weapons, including a "red beard" nuclear bomb that was carried by fixed-wing aircraft.

The museum has magnificent artefacts, but the concern is that it is not as easy for museums to get artefacts from the Ministry of Defence as it should be. I give one example.

About eight years ago, two 4.5 in guns were sold by the MOD for scrap for about £500. Those are unique in history; they are the early model 4.5 in mark 6 turret gun. Priddy's Hard museum is so anxious to obtain one of those guns that it has paid £8,500 for one, and is paying £3,000 today to have it transferred from Pound's shipyard in Portsmouth harbour to the museum. Therefore, somewhere, somehow, someone has lost out on a large amount of money, and it has been difficult for the museum to gain this and other artefacts that will be of significant importance and interest to local visitors to the millennium project in the Gosport-Portsmouth area.

Some time ago, my constituent, Mr. Bill Adnitt, came to my constituency surgery and drew my attention to the fact that Priddy's Hard museum is trying to obtain type 6 gyro sights, gun sight telescopes, open sights, cleaning gear, special stripping tools and books of reference, which, as he pointed out, are all required to give the whole picture of naval and military equipment through the ages.

I took the point up with the Under-Secretary of State for Defence in a letter written on 17 March, in which I asked him whether he agreed

"to make a policy statement that Service-related museums such as Priddy's Hard Armaments Museum and the Royal Naval Submarine Museum in my constituency could be given appropriate indication and opportunities to acquire redundant equipment in order to facilitate their important work of maintaining our naval heritage."

I have absolutely no complaint that I have not yet received a reply; I would not expect to receive a reply to a substantial request within two weeks or so. He and his Department have always been extremely helpful and courteous in responding to requests, but my point is that there is added urgency to the request.

Only yesterday, I was given information about a further item, called a valiant rig, which is currently at HMS Dolphin. Weapon-handling training equipment, it consists of a large steel rig, a dummy torpedo tube—a cut-away version of an air ram—two consoles and various steel attachments. The total weight of that equipment is 20 tonnes. Priddy's Hard museum is anxious to obtain one small part only of that—the dummy torpedo tube.

The due date for tender for those items was 2 April, so it is urgent that the MOD considers my request that museums should be given priority treatment when military equipment becomes redundant. If special instruction is not given by the MOD urgently, the valiant rig, and no doubt many other features, will be sold for scrap for comparatively low prices. What my constituents would like is an instruction that they should be allowed to remove items such as the dummy torpedo tube from items that would otherwise be scrapped, and that they should be put into museums.

This may seem an item of special interest. It is, but it is of keen interest to a number of people in my constituency. If that urgent request is considered by the MOD without delay, it might be possible for artefacts and items of historical interest to be retained by the nation, rather than scrapped.

10.44 am

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I raise another local issue. My constituency lies at the heart of England, and is a transport crossroads for the midlands. At its centre is my home town of Ashby, which is battered, bruised and bewildered from the incessant heavy traffic. The need for some relief is overwhelming, and a town bypass is important for reasons that I will describe.

Historic Ashby is North-West Leicestershire's ancient market town, and it remains a focal point for shopping and commerce. It serves a growing number of town residents, as well as surrounding villages. Ashby boasts more than 150 listed buildings. Some of the historic passages, which are called "courts", off Market street have been converted into period shopping mews. A market is still held in the former town hall. There is a wide choice of licensed premises and places to eat, and a range of accommodation, hotel or bed-and-breakfast.

The bypass is crucial for tourism reasons. Thousands of visitors stop by in Ashby because of its convenient location, encouraged by A42 and M42 signs advertising local services. The town is a base for visiting nearby attractions such as Snibston discovery park, Calke abbey, Donington race track and the new national forest. English Heritage has reported a sharp rise in visitors to Ashby castle, the setting of the tournament in Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe". The castle has become a popular venue for civil war and similar historical re-enactments. The spacious grounds below the castle offer great potential for hosting even larger public spectacles.

The bypass is crucial for environmental reasons. Ashby-de-la Zouch is just two miles from the oak tree marking the centre of the national forest. Westminster wood was launched in the Palace of Westminster only yesterday by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). The wood is in the heart of my constituency.

Because of its features and amenities, Ashby has been described as

"the jewel in the crown"

of the national forest by a director of the National Forest Company, which predicts that the prestigious national resource will in due course attract 6 million visitors every year.

The bypass is crucial for education reasons. My town has five primary and two secondary schools. Many of the 2,300 students who attend Ivanhoe college or Ashby grammar school, a comprehensive of which I am a governor, must cross the A511, the road for which we are trying to obtain a bypass. The grammar school occupies two sites either side of the busy Leicester road, and there is a frequent flow of pupils between those sites. Both Leicester road and North street, past the entrance to Ivanhoe college, are heavily used by vehicles avoiding A511 bottlenecks. Burton road junior school, which has 270 children, is located right on the A511, next to a difficult and dangerous intersection.

A bypass for Ashby is important for employment reasons. The former mining areas of north-west Leicestershire and south Derbyshire, which surround Ashby-de-la-Zouch, have rightly become a focus of regeneration, helped by funding such as RECHAR. Improved access to motorways via Ashby's bypass will encourage business investment. Ashby's largest employers, United Biscuits and Ashby Dairy Company, account for almost 1,000 heavy goods vehicle movements per day. Other centres in the area are expanding, adding to the heavy flows of local and long-haul heavy good vehicles.

The bypass is also crucial for sports and leisure. Ashby's population growth has led to greater demands for sport and recreation. More indoor and outdoor facilities could be accommodated close to the town centre. The national forest is already adding a range of new activities in the surrounding countryside. Uncongested access in and out of the town is needed for the potential to be fully achieved.

The cause of the town's problems is not difficult to identify; it lies at the intersection of two major trunk routes—Birmingham to Nottingham and Leicester to Burton upon Trent. In 1988, before the Ashby section of the A42 opened, traffic levels reached saturation point, with more than 20,000 vehicles passing through the town centre during a 12-hour period.

Since then, housing and industrial developments, the emergence of the M42-A42 as a major traffic corridor and other factors have resulted in traffic levels climbing back from a low of 12,000 to a weekly average approaching 16,000 per 12 hours in Market street and 20,000 again on parts of Nottingham road. Even taking account of the recently completed Derby southern relief road, the county council predicts a further 3,000 vehicles by next year. In the absence of a bypass, vehicles will continue to use rat runs through housing estates and narrow lanes.

The effects of the incessant, injurious flood of traffic are manifold. There is an impact on congestion. The route of the A511 through Ashby involves complex junctions and 90-degree turns that are unsuitable for HGVs and baffling to strangers. The only so-called alternatives to Market street as routes through the town—North street and South street—are restricted to one-way flow because of bends, narrowness and the risk to buildings. Because the shopping and commercial facilities of the town are concentrated in that area, Market street is thronged throughout the day with pedestrians, delivery vehicles and parked cars.

The situation also causes delays. The intricate and crowded nature of Ashby town centre and the controls for pedestrian safety contribute to huge delays in traffic progress. Peak period queues often stretch as far as one mile from Market street back to the A42 intersection. Long tailbacks also build up on the approaches from Measham, Burton and Moira. Residents along the A511 endure a ceaseless barrage of vehicles. Even at a quiet time of day, it can take 10 minutes for a resident to get out of their driveway. When traffic is at its heaviest, it can take almost half an hour to drive one mile across town.

There is an impact on health. It is increasingly recognised that exhaust fumes contribute to respiratory and other health problems. Idling or stop-start driving greatly increase fuel consumption, and therefore emissions. There are also safety considerations. There are three pelican crossings on Market street, with further crossings on Bath street, Derby road and Burton road, which are all within a short distance.

There are also considerations of damage. Ashby boasts many attractive period buildings, which are sensitive to damage from vibration. Properties suffer impact damage to walls or overhangs. A national firm of painting contractors which carried out some work in Market street recently described Ashby as the most polluted town in Britain. The county council estimates that almost 4,000 homes in the town would have substantially lower levels of pollution if traffic was reduced by a mere 25 per cent.

The situation also has an impact on development. Excessive congestion frustrates attempts to develop strategies to maximise the potential of the town centre. Current facilities for coach parties to alight and board are poor. Co-ordinating bus links with the planned Ivanhoe rail link is difficult. The volume of through traffic discourages walking and cycling.

Ashby-de-la-Zouch needs a bypass, but not at any price. Full-scale developer funding would entail a major additional housing development. Given the expansion of the town over the past 15 years, that would be inappropriate. At a recent public meeting, speaker after speaker rejected an offer of private funding from Wilcon Homes, which promised to make full construction costs available once it had built and sold a minimum of 450 homes, which were to be part of a green-field development on the northern side of the town. The eventual objective of that development is to build at least 1,000 further homes. Any proposal from any developer would undoubtedly be similar in scale. The momentum to fill the space available between the town and the bypass would be irresistible.

Construction of the bypass should not be conditional on developments of such magnitude. I am sure that other towns are in a similar situation. The increase in population resulting from such developments would over-burden the town's capacity to cope. That would have two consequences: extra local vehicles and pedestrians would cancel out the benefits of the bypass; and increased demands would lead to out-of-town shopping complexes, which would draw trade from the town centre. Both would jeopardise the town's future. If it developed beyond a critical size, the town's historic identity would be swamped by its suburbs. We want no further developments until the bypass is complete.

My birthplace is facing a crucial period. It must continue to fulfil its traditional local role as a focal point for residents and surrounding communities. It must also prepare to fulfil a new national role as a visitor amenity alongside the M42 at the heart of the national forest. The

[Mr. David Taylor]

removal of through traffic is essential. A bypass will make Ashby safer and healthier for residents and visitors, removing frustrating delays, and assisting the preservation and development of the town's amenities. Public funding of the bypass will bring about the necessary improvements without sacrificing Ashby's identity as an historic market town.

As with any road scheme, the environmental costs must be weighed against the benefits. The integrated transport strategy and roads review are considering those issues. The value of the town centre environment vastly outweighs the intrusion that a short bypass would make into the countryside. The projected route of the bypass crosses no sites of special scientific interest. In addition to the bypass, local campaigners strongly support the development of the Ivanhoe rail link to Leicester and Burton upon Trent as a vital component in a town transport strategy that will integrate with the national strategy.

Local people were dismayed that the problems of A511 congestion were not solved when the A42-M42 corridor was created. They will be outraged if they are denied their bypass now.

I congratulate the campaigners on their long efforts to secure a bypass to relieve the incessant heavy flows of traffic that pour through the heart of the town. The campaign has reached a crucial stage, with a submission soon to be made to the county council, which will look to the Government for assistance. The road is essential to reduce congestion, increase safety, decrease pollution and improve the physical environment for residents and visitors. The long-delayed project will deliver great social, economic and environmental benefits for all those who live in, depend on or care about our town.

Local residents and town organisations believe that the scheme should not—I repeat, should not—depend on developer funding, because further expansion would be seriously counter-productive. It should be financed publicly. I strongly endorse that view. I am working with the Bypass Ashby Now Group to persuade the county council and my Government of the overwhelming benefits of that approach.

10.58 am

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am very grateful for the opportunity in this Adjournment debate to raise the issue of industrial workers suffering from lung diseases. I should like specifically to comment on the position of slate quarrymen and coal miners, although the issue may affect other industrial workers.

I find it somewhat ironic to be campaigning on that issue in this—possibly my last—Parliament. In my first Parliament, from 1974 to 1979, I was involved in a prolonged campaign to secure compensation for slate quarrymen suffering from silicosis and pneumoconiosis. The campaign led to the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979, which has enabled about £50 million in compensation to be paid, not only to slate quarrymen but to other industrial workers who previously—because their employers were defunct—did not have a compensation vehicle. We seem to be facing a re-run of those earlier circumstances, which are now affecting quarrymen and ex-quarrymen suffering from emphysema and chronic bronchitis whose former employers are defunct.

A few weeks ago, an historic court victory by the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers—on behalf of coal miners and ex-miners suffering from emphysema, chronic bronchitis and asthma—has placed a new focus on the issue. I pay tribute to Bleddyn Hancock, the general secretary of NACODS, who ran a 10-year campaign to win the victory, which should benefit 50,000—perhaps more—miners, ex-miners and their widows.

I want to press Ministers to clarify their response to the court case, and to receive from them assurances on implementing the compensation payments for coal miners that were implicit in the court settlement. The initial reaction to the case of the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry was that the Government would meet the settlement in full, and that the cost might be as much as £1,000 million or more. However, subsequent developments have caused some concern.

Interim payments of only £2,000 have been offered in each of 5,000 cases, for a total of about £10 million. I should like an assurance that the Government will settle all cases in full; that the Government will settle all cases of emphysema and chronic bronchitis; that the court's comment on asthma will be considered; and that not only workers but their widows will be compensated. I should like to be assured also that the Government will not nit-pick in each case, trying to make each individual prove his suffering. After those workers' long wait for recognition of their entitlement, it would be cruel to deal with their cases in that manner.

I specifically hope that the Government will move quickly, because those people have suffered for so long already, waiting for a settlement. There may be—I hope not—a vested interest among some lawyers working for the Government to try to drag out the matter.

I shall warmly welcome the Government's prompt and full settlement of the coal miners' cases. However, we are back to the position of slate quarrymen—and, undoubtedly, of other workers—whose suffering is just as great as that of the coal miners. Anyone who has seen those men struggling for breath appreciates what they are going through. Many of those who have not been diagnosed as suffering from pneumoconiosis or silicosis have precisely the same struggle to breathe, as they are suffering from emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Slate quarrymen and coal miners experience precisely the same suffering. Anyone living in a slate quarrying community will have no doubt that working in dusty slate quarries or slate mines leads to suffering from emphysema and chronic bronchitis, just as working in dusty coal mines leads to other conditions.

Unfortunately, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council has so far failed to acknowledge the link between working in the slate industry and the incidence of emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Statistical arguments are used against recognising the incidence of those diseases. Sadly, because the number of slate quarrymen is relatively small, it is difficult to prove the connection. However, the suffering is just as great in each case. We must urgently accept the fact that emphysema and chronic bronchitis are industrial lung conditions among quarrymen.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Hear, hear.

Mr. Wigley: My hon. Friend has many workers in his constituency, as I do, who suffer from those diseases.

If the link is recognised, quarrymen would be entitled to industrial injuries disability benefit.

I draw to the Minister's attention recent developments and evidence from other countries, which show that the matter should perhaps be re-examined by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. Studies of quarrymen in eastern Germany and of gold miners in Australia, and analysis of lung conditions of workers in potteries, raise the broader issue of the link between industrial working conditions, emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Regardless of whether quarrymen with emphysema and chronic bronchitis are granted disability benefit on the basis of that link, the coal miners' court victory raises the entirely independent matter of lump sum compensation. The Government are reluctant—as they were in the 1970s—to consider quarrymen in the same category as coal miners. The basic argument revolves around the fact that the Government acknowledged responsible for coal miners, who worked for the National Coal Board, which was a public sector employer. Conversely, slate quarrymen worked for subsequently defunct private employers.

On 4 March 1998, in a letter to me, the Prime Minister gave those reasons for refusing slate quarrymen's case. He said:

"In addition, we are committed to honouring legitimate claims against British Coal because we have inherited the health liabilities from a state-owned Corporation. The quarrying industry has never been subject to similar state ownership."

Exactly the same argument was used in the 1970s, in response to slate quarrymen and others suffering from pneumoconiosis, silicosis and other lung diseases. Those men worked for defunct private companies, and therefore could not sue their previous employer for compensation. The purpose of the 1979 Act was to provide them with compensation. It is not acceptable now to rely on that old argument.

The principle of compensation for quarrymen suffering from pneumoconiosis and silicosis was won and established in the 1970s, and it should set a precedent. Quarrymen must not be forgotten, as they were in that long-drawn-out five-year period in the mid-1970s—from the recognition that coal miners should receive lump sum compensation, to payments to quarrymen under the 1979 Act.

The 1979 Act provides a framework that the Transport and General Workers' Union believes could be used as a vehicle to pay compensation to those suffering from emphysema, chronic bronchitis and similar lung diseases. Section 1(3) of the Act, as amended by the Social Security Act 1985, states:

"The diseases to which this Act applies are pneumoconiosis, byssinosis and diffuse mesothelioma [and any other disease which is specified by the Secretary of State for the purposes of this Act by order made by statutory instrument.]"

The subsection enables the Secretary of State to introduce a statutory instrument to include emphysema and chronic bronchitis under that section of the 1979 Act, and thereby create a vehicle to pay compensation to quarrymen, ex-quarrymen and their widows, who have suffered so much.

Coal miners rightly deserve their compensation, which I hope they soon receive. But, please, let us not yet again forget the quarrymen.

11.7 am

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to raise a most unusual, but very important case from my constituency, which occurs in the small market town of Bungay, in Suffolk. The case highlights the problems that an individual might face when trying to obtain justice from a large organisation.

Mountbatten road, in Bungay, borders the open countryside, and the rear gardens of some of the properties look out over the countryside. However, there is no danger of green-field house building beyond those rear gardens, because behind them lies a hole—a pit, which is becoming larger every time it rains. The local media called it "a canyon in formation". It is not a joke for the residents—particularly Mr. and Mrs. Watts, who live in Mountbatten road—because the edge of that canyon has now crept up to their rear garden fence. Every time it rains, they fear that their rear garden may begin to disappear. Even worse, the situation is affecting the value of their home, which—like the other modern, detached homes in the road—they have been told is unsaleable.

How did the situation occur? The hole is an old sand and gravel pit, which lay undisturbed and overgrown for at least 50 years—some say 100 years—with its sides secure and covered by vegetation. The pit was not thought of as a problem by the planners when building the Mountbatten road homes, well away from the edge of the pit. Then, a few years ago, the Essex and Suffolk Water company entered the frame. The company supplies water to several parts of East Anglia, and these days, it is part of Lyonnaise des Eaux, a giant corporation of vast resources and reserves.

In the late 1980s, the Essex and Suffolk Water company needed to lay a new water main to supply the town of Bungay and had to cross land to the rear of Mountbatten road. Amazingly, the water main was laid around the edge of the pit, just a few feet from the rim. In October 1993, during heavy rainfall, a land slip occurred, with a quite spectacular result: 20 ft of large blue water main pipe was left suspended across the sides of the pit, which was becoming enlarged as the rain eroded it.

Essex and Suffolk Water reacted swiftly. It dismantled and rerouted the pipe—but where? It rerouted it around the edge of the newly enlarged pit, a few feet from the rim. That sounds amazing, but it is true. It is also true that, in September 1994, another heavy rainstorm caused another land slip, and we saw another aerial water main. Meanwhile, the canyon was becoming larger. I have seen photographs of the results, which created much interest among local people at the time.

The water company returned to the site and again rerouted the pipe—guess where? It again rerouted it around the rim of the newly enlarged pit, although with one difference. It did not bury the water main; it left the pipe lying on the surface and erected a fence around it to keep people away. One has heard of surface water; that was a surface water main. The water company has never said why it did not bury the pipe a third time, although I think that we can guess. There the water pipe lay until July last year.

My constituents, having complained unsuccessfully to the water company, came to see me. The obvious way forward to me was to have a site meeting in order to get senior people from the company down to have a look at what was happening. My first request to Essex and

[Mr. Bob Blizzard]

Suffolk Water did not receive a positive response. It is the only time since I became a Member of Parliament that a written request has been received in such a way. My second letter induced the company finally to agree to meet its customers' elected representative on site. By the time we had the site meeting, however, the pipe had been moved, rerouted and buried in a trench on the other side of the field. The work was carried out in July in the middle of the crop-growing season, and involving paying a farmer considerable compensation for disturbing his crops. That was the end of the water pipe problem; the problem for the people of Mountbatten road is that the pit remains and is becoming larger each time it rains.

The water company accepts no responsibility and is refusing to carry out work to stabilise the sides of the pit. I and many others find that quite staggering. We are asked to believe and accept that digging a trench a few feet from the rim of a pit and then filling it in has no effect on the stability of the land around it. We are asked to accept that, after a pit had been stable for 50 years or more, its collapse within a few years of the pipe being laid had nothing to do with the laying of the pipe.

Despite a repeat performance, we are asked to accept that there was nothing wrong with the water company's engineering. We are asked to accept that there is no ground for wondering why the water company did not learn its lesson after its first attempt. We are asked to accept that the eventual relocation of the pipe on the other side of the field does not show that the original siting was completely wrong. I think that it is an admission by deed of the folly of trying to site a water main around the edge of a pit. That seems common sense to me, but I am only a lay person. A qualified consulting engineer engaged by Mr. Watts has, however, come to the same conclusion in a detailed report. Unfortunately for the residents, the water company has produced its own consulting engineer who refutes that report.

Other evidence is, however, beginning to emerge. The water company's engineer made some verbal comments in 1994 to the effect that he would be recommending repair of the pit. There is evidence that the water company approached the landowner in 1994 with a view to carrying out some repair work. In fact, the water company consultant's report in 1997 said:

"I still"—

I emphasise the word "still"—

"believe that the pit can be adequately infilled and protected and retained."

There is evidence that the water company originally wanted to put the water main on the other side of the field, but did not fancy dealing with the farmer with whom it has since had to deal. Still, the water company accepts no responsibility.

Is this a case for the Office of Water Services? Unfortunately, Ofwat's response to my constituent was that it had "only a limited role" to play in such matters. Its letter says that it has

"no formal jurisdiction over complaints about pipe laying from work done prior to September 1989",

even though the pipes were relaid in 1993 and 1994. To my knowledge, no one from Ofwat even bothered to visit the site. There is an issue about the apparent ineffectiveness of Ofwat in such a case. I welcome the Government's review of the regulatory powers of such bodies and hope that they will take account of remarkable cases such as the one that I have raised.

Apart from the case, I am concerned about the way in which the water company handled my inquiry. I find that organisations are normally fulsome and open in their response to an inquiry from a Member of Parliament, if only to demonstrate that they have nothing to hide. That was not so in this case. The water company co-operated reluctantly and said as little as possible.

This case is the worst case of injustice that I have come across in the 11 months since I became a Member of Parliament. Essex and Suffolk Water is a large, prosperous and long-standing company which predates the Conservative privatisation programme and does not generally have a bad reputation in our area. In this case, it is walking away from its responsibility, acting cynically and failing to explain itself openly. People in my constituency face the prospect of their homes becoming worthless. They are not asking for compensation; they just want the water company to come back and stabilise the pit. I do not think that that is too much to ask.

11.16 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Before the House rises for its short Easter recess, I am grateful for the opportunity to raise two matters relating to foreign and Commonwealth affairs and one domestic matter for the Government's consideration.

I feel impelled to raise the foreign and Commonwealth issues for two reasons. First, I shared the pretty bitter disappointment felt in more than one quarter of the House that the Foreign Secretary did not make a statement after his visit to the middle east last month. A visit by a British Foreign Secretary to six countries is, on any account, an important visit. It was also important because the purpose of his tour was to revive the middle east peace process. Secondly, my Question 18 was not reached in Foreign Office questions yesterday and I was not able to catch Madam Speaker's eye to raise one of the matters in a supplementary question.

I should like first to raise the question of Cyprus. I very much welcome its application to join the European Union. Indeed, if conditions are right, I would like to see the EU considerably enlarged. Cyprus is well placed to join the EU, if only—but not only—because its economy is in very good shape. It is one of the very few countries that meets the Maastricht economic convergence criteria, which is more than can be said for the majority of the 11 countries that are hellbent on the foolish escapade of trying to start a single currency on the first day of next year.

My fear is that, as I think might have happened before on matters relating to Cyprus, the United States Government might intervene quietly—albeit behind the scenes—and, in order not to offend Turkey, which is of course a member of NATO, try to delay or, indeed, undermine negotiations on Cyprus. I very much hope that will not be the case. I should be grateful if the Leader of the House could appeal to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister to use their good offices and considerable contacts with the United States President and Congress to ensure that that does not happen.

The second issue that I wish to raise is Syria. My question yesterday to the Foreign Secretary was listed at No.18 on the Order Paper, and I later received a written answer. I asked him to make a statement on his recent visit to Syria. He replied:

"I had useful discussions on regional issues with President Asad and Foreign Minister Shara'a. We agreed on the need for movement on all tracks of the Middle East Peace Process."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. *198*.]

If I may say so, that is a classic parliamentary answer of its genre. It is presumably accurate; it gives me the minimum information; and, most certainly, it leaves me no wiser.

I wanted to find out from the Foreign Secretary what influence he had had and whether he had discussed with the Syrian Government the very constructive proposal by the Israeli Government that they would be prepared to move their troops out of southern Lebanon, provided that Syria could give some assurances that it would discourage terrorism from the southern part of Lebanon by Hezbollah and other terrorist groups.

I further wanted to ask the Foreign Secretary whether there was any response to the suggestion that I put to him at the previous Foreign and Commonwealth Question Time that, if Israel were to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon, it would be a most satisfactory quid pro quo if the Syrian troops were withdrawn from the north of Lebanon. Again, I should be very grateful if the Leader of the House would communicate those points to the Foreign Secretary. If it is not possible to have replies to my questions at the end of this debate—I quite understand that it might not be—could the House have the information in the form of a detailed written answer from the Foreign Secretary; although, as I said, I should have preferred an oral answer?

The domestic matter to which I referred relates to possible changes to the parliamentary calendar. I have the privilege to be Chairman of the Select Committee on Accommodation and Works. In that capacity, I was moved to write last December to the Leader of the House, in her capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, asking whether she could make an early statement on any changes that might be proposed to the parliamentary calendar.

The reason I did so was that there is some anxiety that, if the 10 to 12-week parliamentary summer recess were to be significantly changed, it might prejudice some of the necessary renovation and improvement works that we have to conduct in the Palace of Westminster. That in itself is not of paramount importance, but it is necessary to plan many months ahead.

With her usual courtesy, the Leader of the House replied promptly and said that she was circulating to other members of the Modernisation Committee my concerns on the matter. I understand from what she said a few days ago that there is going to be a further report from that Committee shortly after Easter. I do not know whether it will deal with the parliamentary calendar but, even if she cannot divulge in advance what the report is going to say, it would be extremely helpful to know as soon as possible that any changes to the parliamentary calendar—we are not here to argue whether there should be any—will not be put into practice before next year at the earliest, so that the planned works can go ahead as planned in this summer recess.

Once again, I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to raise these three issues in the House.

11.25 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I want to bring to the House's attention the advisory committee report—the Gordon committee report—on listed sporting events to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has promised a response soon after Easter. If implemented, the report would, among other things, threaten the future live coverage of domestic test cricket and future football world cup tournaments on terrestrial television.

It is my central contention that the Gordon committee report is a tremendous lost opportunity and that there are alternatives. Let us take a random example. Australia, the land of Mr. Murdoch's birth, passed a broadcasting Act—the anti-siphoning Act—in 1992. It lists 42 national and international sporting events which must by law first be offered to terrestrial television before being offered to subscription or pay television. That includes all Australia's international cricket, football and rugby matches, at home and abroad. Interestingly, it also includes our own FA cup final.

Down under, it is realised that it is not enough to nurture today's sporting champions in sporting academies, important though that is. It is also important to inspire future generations of sportsmen and women by ensuring widespread access to great international and national sporting events on terrestrial television.

If test cricket is de-listed in this country, we could find ourselves in an absurd situation. The next time that, for example, England wins the Ashes by beating Australia at, say, Headingley, there is no guarantee that the residents of Leeds will be able to watch that historic occasion live on terrestrial television. The residents of Sydney, if they so chose, would be able to sit up through the night and watch their team take a pasting.

It is live action that quickens the pulse. It is live sporting action on terrestrial television, available to all, that creates a great shared experience. Recorded highlights are important, and the Gordon committee has something to say about them, but they are essentially second best. They do not have the immediacy and do not give a sense of being there. Indeed, they are not watched. Other than "Match of the Day", recorded sporting highlights have minuscule viewing figures.

I shall highlight the effect that the Gordon committee might have on just two or three sports if its report is implemented. Let us first consider just two of the Gordon committee's arguments for de-listing domestic test cricket. The first is that terrestrial television services cannot or should not cover lengthy sporting events in full. I would contend that that is a judgment not for the Gordon committee or, indeed, for Parliament, but for the broadcasters themselves. In fact, terrestrial television broadcasters have a long history of covering these events in full. It is up to them to make the necessary judgment.

The second argument that the Gordon committee advances in favour of de-listing test cricket is that it is not a shared point in the national calendar, which is one of the criteria for listed events which the Government laid down for the Gordon committee.

By its very nature, cricket is an event that builds up over time. It operates at a civilised pace, and a test series is an integral whole. For example, no one could argue that

[Mr. John Grogan]

Botham's century at, I think, Headingley in the 1980s, which turned around the test series at that time, was not a unique point in the national calendar. It is something that people enjoyed and to which they look back, but it built up over time. There was a dynamic in that test series. Some people say that some test matches should be listed and others should not.

Had the English Test and County Cricket Board had its way, and had only the Lord's test match been listed because it was, in the board's view, a "society event", terrestrial television viewers could have seen England lose heavily at Lord's, but would have missed the unique moment at Headingley, which would be absurd. I do not think that the argument about a shared point stands up.

It is important to remember that pensioners in particular watch cricket test matches on television. Half of all people over 65 tune in at some point over the summer.

No one is suggesting that these events should be given away by the sporting bodies. There is a regulatory mechanism in operation. The Broadcasting Act 1996 gave the Independent Television Commission the responsibility, if necessary, to decide fair prices for these events.

If we de-list, the immediate effect would probably be that some test matches would stay on terrestrial television, but others would not. However, terrestrial television and its viewers would definitely get second best, as they have done with next year's cricket world cup. The England and Wales Cricket Board sold the primary rights to Sky, and the BBC had to negotiate for secondary rights. Most of England's games in the cricket world cup next year will not be on terrestrial television, even though the event is in England.

That brings me to football. We are all making cross-party efforts to bring the 2006 football world cup to England. If the Gordon committee report is accepted, as few as five or six games may be broadcast live on terrestrial television—the final, the semi-finals and the games featuring the home nations, those being shown only in those home nations.

The broadcasting rights for that world cup have already been sold to a German media entrepreneur, Mr. Kirsch—it is the first time that the European Broadcasting Union has lost the rights to the world cup—and Mr. Kirsch is on record as saying that he will sell all he can to the highest bidder. The domestic political row that would erupt if few games could be shown on British terrestrial television, despite the large sums of public money that would no doubt go into the bid, would dwarf the current row in France about tickets for this year's world cup tournament.

It is worth remembering that the Gordon committee says that Scottish games should necessarily be shown live only in Scotland, so if—as is also the case in a few weeks' time—Scotland played Brazil in the 2006 world cup, that game would be shown live in Scotland, but not necessarily in England. I do not think that Scots living in England would take too kindly to that, and there would probably be massive cross-border movements that weekend. If we accept the Gordon committee report in respect of the football world cup, the only people who will be better off are Mr. Kirsch, who holds the broadcasting rights, and those—presumably satellite television companies—to whom he sells the rights.

Finally, there is rugby, which was completely neglected by the Gordon committee report. This year is the first that some of the five nations matches have not been available on terrestrial television and the viewing figures have plummeted. At the very least, the committee should have considered listing the rugby world cup. The committee insulted the game of rugby league: the rugby league authorities asked for the challenge cup final to be listed, but the Gordon committee dismissed their views and said that rugby league was not significant, except in a few parts of the country. I remind the committee that the London Broncos were in the semi-finals of the rugby league challenge cup final only a few weeks ago, so a London team might have been playing in the final.

In summary, there are three reasons why the Government should turn down the Gordon committee report. First, the report ignores the views of viewers and those of the sporting grass roots. Secondly, we are dealing with monopoly suppliers—there is only one test series and one world cup. Monopolies cannot be trusted, and have to be tightly regulated in the public interest. Thirdly, massive sums of public money are at stake: over the past three years, cricket has received £50 million from the lottery and a great deal of money is going into the world cup. It is remarkable that the Gordon committee chose not to list live coverage of the Commonwealth games, given that £100 million is going into the Commonwealth games to be held in Manchester in 2002.

I have received many letters on this subject, so I shall end my speech by quoting from one, from the secretary of Bishopthorpe cricket club in my constituency, Andrew Copeland. He speaks for many ordinary cricket clubs in this country when he says:

"Bishopthorpe Cricket Club are unanimously against any removal of International Cricket from listed status. We believe that at a time where organisations like Bishopthorpe CC, the local sports authorities and the government should be encouraging the next generation to be more sports orientated that attempts to boost viewing figures should be made, not reduce them. Instead we seem to allow simple commercial pressures to dictate the situation and the result is that only a privileged few can view these events."

We have a Government of the many, not the few, so I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when he makes his decision, to kick the Gordon committee report into touch.

11.33 am

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): There are several topics relating to my county of Kent that the House should address before it adjourns, but I shall deal briefly with only a handful.

First, there is the channel tunnel rail link. I have no qualms about returning to that essential matter at a time when the Government are seriously considering what should be done. There is a powerful argument that the economic case for the link has not been made and that it should be done away with altogether. That would delight my constituents, who have to bear the costs of blight and construction disruption. However, if we are to go ahead with the link, for goodness' sake, let us build it as it was decided by Parliament, in total, now.

The idea that the link should be built in bits, starting with the bit that is least needed—the section passing through Kent—and putting on hold indefinitely the bit that goes through London, is totally absurd. Almost as absurd is the notion that we should return to British Rail's

discredited proposal that the line should turn left and go into Waterloo. If there is a justification for the channel tunnel rail link, it is that it would link the rest of the United Kingdom to the channel, so to accept the proposal that it should turn into Waterloo—again, for an indefinite period—while east London continues to suffer interminable blight is absolutely out of the question.

I am deeply concerned by what I understand is the current activity of Railtrack, which is going around parishes in Kent re-examining the evidence given to the Select Committees in an attempt to discredit that evidence, so that environmental safeguards can be thrown out of the window, which would be absolutely disgraceful. Ministers have assured us that, if the link goes ahead, the environmental safeguards decreed by Parliament will be honoured in full, so any attempt to do the opposite would be both discreditable and in contempt of the House.

Secondly, my county is suffering to a wholly unreasonable extent from the astonishing gap between the duty on liquor and tobacco in Britain and that levied across the channel. Constant representations to the Conservative Government on this matter failed, but the problem is becoming worse and the gap is widening. As we foretold, it has become an outrageous invitation to crime: crime relating to the smuggling of liquor and tobacco is increasing all the time, and the police are aware that gangs are moving in and becoming increasingly violent. There is something extraordinary about a Government who are committed to reducing crime but whose policy is, in fact, encouraging it.

I am especially glad that my local brewer, Shepherd Neame, whose action was thrown out at an earlier hearing at the insistence of the Solicitor-General and which was refused leave to appeal, has now been given such leave, largely thanks to the sophisticated intervention of the company's barrister at the short judicial hearing, one Cherie Booth.

I hope that the Government will address this enormous threat to Kent jobs and Kent security before the problem worsens. It is all very well to say that people benefit from the opportunity to import cheap liquor, but the same people will be deeply upset if their village pub dies because it cannot compete with an increasingly dishonest trade.

Thirdly, I wish to raise the question of the fruit industry. I have more acreage under top fruit and soft fruit than any other constituency Member of Parliament, but I know that people sometimes forget what an enormous industry the fruit industry is. In Kent, there are growers whose wages bill exceeds £1 million a year, and that sort of injection into the local economy is indispensable, yet the fruit industry receives no Government subsidy. It would be easy to grub out all the trees or remove all the strawberry plants and grow instead some heavily subsidised grain crop, which gave no local employment whatever.

The issue I urge the Leader of the House to take seriously is one that I have raised with the Secretary of State for Social Security. Fruit pickers are becoming almost impossible to get because the interaction between benefits entitlement and the wages of seasonal workers has become so complex. Many of the workers were housewives, who delivered their children to school and were happy to earn considerable sums by picking for several hours before going away to collect their children. It has become impossible for them to take on the work because, if they are on any form of benefit, such as housing benefit, they not only lose it but cannot get back on to it. That is an important issue. The industry provides employment that is particularly valued by a large number of permanent and part-time workers and is worth many millions of pounds.

Finally, the reconfiguration of hospitals is another tremendously important issue in my constituency. The town of Faversham is particularly at risk from East Kent health authority's proposal to downgrade Kent and Canterbury hospital. More than anything else, we need an assurance from Ministers that, when the issue reaches them for consideration, as it surely will, they will give access to hospital care its proper place in the hierarchy of importance. Many studies have shown that the ability of families and parents to visit children, or families and friends to visit sick relatives, enormously assists the curative process. Sometimes, the fascination with high-tech machinery and specialist medicine has caused us to play down the enormous importance of accessibility. I hope that we can have some reassurance on that issue above all.

11.41 am

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): Like most hon. Members, I want principally to raise a constituency issue, which is road safety, particularly for children going to and from school. I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) introduced the Home Zones Bill a few weeks ago to create zones in which pedestrians have priority over vehicles and in which the speed limit would be cut to 10 mph, which is a good thing.

I shall draw on a few statistics. In 1971, 70 per cent. of children aged seven walked to school. By 1990, that percentage had dropped to less than 10 per cent. The United Kingdom has probably the worst record in western Europe on child pedestrian accidents, many of which occur while children are going to and from school, and one in five peak-time journeys in this country are undertaken by drivers taking children to or from school.

I have become involved with two primary schools in my constituency that are trying to get pedestrian crossings built outside them. Ayloff's junior school is on the busy Southend road and has a fairly ineffective zebra crossing. I know from my experience that it is dangerous, as I was nearly knocked over on it during the election campaign. Perhaps my opponent was driving the car, but in any case I nearly came off the worst in the encounter. Scargill's junior school is also in my constituency—[*Laughter.*] I thought that that would go down well. The school has initiated a powerful local campaign to have a pelican crossing built outside it, as there have been a number of near misses.

The problem is that councils lack the resources and have to satisfy many criteria before they can build a crossing. Many councils, not merely Hornchurch and Rainham in my constituency but councils throughout the country, say that there must first be an accident—in some cases, a death—before they can build a crossing. Surely the argument should be that we should have crossings on busy roads before there are accidents and before children are hit by cars and, in my constituency, by lorries. Many heavy goods vehicles go through Rainham in the south of the constituency and many children are exposed to risk going to and from school.

[Mr. John Cryer]

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport is to enable councils to reduce the 30-mph speed limit in built-up areas to 20 mph without reference to central Government. That is an important step—or will be when it is introduced. That brings me to my fundamental point, which is that we must aim to make our streets safe again for children—I am sure that that is what the Government would like to aim for—so that they are not in danger from traffic.

The newspapers are full of news about paedophiles being released into the community, which is of understandable concern to many people. Children are at far greater risk of being knocked over by a car or truck than of being attacked by a stranger, yet we do not seem to have as emotional a response when a child is hit by half a tonne of flying metal. I would have said that that was something to get upset about. Clearly, parents who have been through that are emotional about it and think of road safety as an important issue, but people often get involved only when they are directly affected. I want that to change.

Local authorities need more resources for crossings, traffic calming and other measures that would make streets safer, particularly in constituencies such as mine. My local council of Havering can afford only a handful of traffic-calming schemes and crossings a year, and those usually result from deaths or injuries on the road. I also want some other changes, all of which would mean more investment and resources. That is crucial. We will not get change without more investment, and I want central Government to invest directly through local authorities in traffic-calming measures and new crossings.

I also want a return to the "fares fair" policy practised by the old Greater London Council. Perhaps the new Greater London Authority could introduce such a scheme under the new strategic transport authority. Under the "fares fair" policy 12 years ago, in a large part of London between 9 am and 10 am, roads that are now clogged were almost empty of traffic, apart from buses. That was far safer and far more sensible. It also made it far easier for people who did not have much money to get about or go across London, into the west end, central London or wherever.

We have to convince parents that children should walk or cycle to school, and many schemes are now in place. Sustrans—a civil engineering, pro-cycling charity—is involved in schemes with 10 local authorities and their schools to pioneer encouraging children to cycle to school, and I am told that it has made a big impact in a large part of the country, and in York and Leeds in particular.

Traffic control must be made a higher priority for the police. In my area, they have been involved in a number of exercises to crack down on illegal parking outside schools, which is an extremely dangerous practice. We must make traffic control a much higher priority for the police nationally, and provide the manpower on the street to deal with it.

Finally, on an international issue, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) made an extraordinary speech. Essentially, he gave us a rationale for telling the European Commission to get lost and stick its economic policies, and for our pursuing our own micro-economic policies. After a terrific speech about manufacturing industry, and textiles in particular, he then concluded that the Commission was a wonderful thing and that we should stick by it. If I live to be 150, I will never understand the mentality of the Liberals, who mount such terrific attacks and critiques of the European Union only to end up saying that it is a great and wonderful institution, and that we should stick with it.

A large number of Tory Members went along with the Maastricht treaty—one or two of them even negotiated it. They went along with it, supported it, signed it and voted for it—this incredible, right-wing, Euromonetarist stream of poison that we are having to live with—and now they hold up their hands and say, "It's nothing to do with us. We are all opposed to it." The news of which Conservative Members are perhaps unaware is that the time to oppose a treaty—or tear it up, which I would have done—is before it is signed. It is a little late to start wringing one's hands afterwards and saying, "It's a terrible thing; I am sorry we signed it, but we were duped," which is what former Prime Minister Mrs. Thatcher seemed to say about the Single European Act.

In the early 1970s, we were taken into the European Union by the Conservative Government without any mandate from the people. It took a Labour Government to hold a referendum. Those who campaigned against membership undoubtedly lost that referendum because Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister, decided at the last minute to support the Common Market, as it was then. According to the Government's publication "Britain's New Deal in Europe", that U-turn was based on a number of promises—principally that there would be no European exchange rate mechanism, so there would be no threat to jobs, and, secondly, that we would have a veto over any policies that we did not like.

Those two elements have both gone out of the window. We have had the ERM disaster and we are heading towards a single currency, and Mrs. Thatcher signed away the veto in the Single European Act, something which I shall never understand in a million years. She now tries to claim that she had nothing to do with that, which is extraordinary.

The EU is an entirely anti-democratic institution, in which there is little or no accountability. Certainly in the European Commission there is no accountability. It has no register of interests. At least the House has a Register of Members' Interests in which Members have to record their relevant interests. Commissioners and their staff can be wined and dined by big business and given all sorts of freebies, but there is no record of that. In the end, that can influence policy. Directives which fly out of Brussels are the product of lobbying by big business. The idea that the EU is based on some sort of democratic ideal of a united Europe is nonsense. It is propaganda from beginning to end.

I am not a little Englander; I am an internationalist. That is why I oppose the single currency and the EU. I am glad that the Government are committed to holding a referendum within the next five years, but I should like to see it held now. If that happened, unlike 20 years ago, the noes would win.

11.51 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I have four brief points to raise before the House adjourns for the Easter recess. The first concerns solicitors. The House is full of solicitors and I have many friends who are solicitors. We all know that they like self-regulation. But I have been disappointed by the procedures in place to examine complaints against them.

One particular case with which I have been dealing has been going on for more than two years. I reported it to the Solicitors Complaints Bureau, which is now the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors. It has gone from there to the ombudsman on three occasions. The ombudsman has disagreed with what the original body had to say and, at the end of it all, nothing has been achieved. Therefore, I, as a layman, am against self-regulation for solicitors.

My second point concerns the regulations governing the safe carrying of cargo on lorries. I have had many complaints about the sort of goods that are carried on lorries on the A13 and the A127 in my constituency, all of which I have taken seriously. I had not expected to be the victim of a near-fatal accident this week, which would have caused a by-election—about which no doubt some would have been pleased.

I was on my way to visit someone in hospital and I was driving behind a huge lorry carrying a vast amount of timber. With no warning at all, a great wooden support flew off the top, coming towards my windscreen like an arrow. I thought that my time was up and that I was about to meet my maker. The object met the centre of force, which I am big-headed enough to claim might have been me, but instead of going through the windscreen, it bounced on top of the car. I gave chase, but the huge articulated lorry did not stop. I eventually got its number and am dealing with the matter.

Having examined the regulations governing the carrying of loads by lorries, I do not believe that the law is satisfactory. Given what the Labour party has done to the value of the pound, these are tough times and we need more exports, and I have no desire to do lorries out of any work, but as a near victim I think that we must be much more careful in securing loads.

My third point concerns education, particularly with regard to Essex county council and Southend borough council. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) said about the Conservatives who have run Essex county council since 1 April, but he is not giving the House the full picture. I had a meeting with the new administration last night, and the Labour and Liberal parties should be thoroughly ashamed of the way in which they have left the council's finances.

Matters are even worse than that, however. The hon. Gentleman should not hark back only to 1 April and Conservative control. His row must be with his own Government. As a result of what happened on 1 April, the council had a pernicious settlement, and all sorts of cuts have had to be inflicted on the good people, which is certainly not what the Conservatives want.

For example, the Labour Government gave the council extra money for education but cut funding for other matters. It received only a half percentage point increase, much lower than the rate of inflation. The Conservatives are in a difficult situation. I rejoice on behalf of Southend because its primary schools will receive 13.6 per cent. more in cash than last year, as compared with 5.7 per cent. for Essex county council.

The School Standards and Framework Bill is causing havoc in my constituency. I am inundated with representations. There are three grammar schools in my constituency of Southend, West and one in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). The regulations for the ballots of local residents, if they go forward, are a disgrace.

For example, Southend would have an electorate of 50,000, whereas other areas, such as Chelmsford and Colchester, would have much smaller electorates of fewer than 10,000. The ramifications are obvious. Grammar schools in Southend offer places to 24 per cent. of local children, constituting a far less selective intake and catering for a far wider socio-economic background than the super-selective schools in Chelmsford and Colchester, although I have nothing against them.

My schools are worried about their settlements. Many are grant-maintained. A wonderful special school, St. Christopher's, has a substantial amount of lottery funding, about which I am pleased. But my grant- maintained schools are worried about how money will be allocated in future.

Moreover, the idea that the abolition of the assisted places scheme will result in the reduction of class sizes in my constituency is nonsense. Since we have had a Labour Government, all classes have grown in size. Westborough school has 800 children in its primary school.

My final point concerns Parliament. I have listened carefully to what has been said about the BBC, but hon. Members should open their eyes to what is happening. The Leader of the House had a brief exchange with me on the matter on Monday, but since 1 May the House of Commons is being destroyed. That is why our proceedings are not being reported. We no longer have a Prime Minister; we have a President. Every Wednesday we have a presidential address lasting half an hour. I have never heard such sycophantic questions in all my life as those put by Labour Members, who say, "The sun is shining, Oh Great One. It is marvellous and it is all thanks to the Labour Government."

What is going on is ridiculous. We have the youngest Prime Minister this century, yet his voting record so far is 5 per cent. That compares with 30 per cent. for my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven. The Leader of the House argued that the Prime Minister has many important duties. His two predecessors were under enormous pressure with equally important matters to attend to, but they thought that this place was important and they came here to vote regularly. What is going on is a disgrace.

In addition, there is the problem of the behaviour of some Ministers. In particular, I mention those from the Department of Health and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. A number of Ministers—not all—who leap to the Dispatch Box are insulting in what they say. When it comes to correspondence, Ministers are now too grand even to sign their own letters. They "pp" letters all the time and fudge answers to questions. They are very discourteous. We have always used first names in correspondence in the House, but they now use surnames and sign the letter, "Yours sincerely".

Is it any wonder that correspondents feel that our deliberations are no longer worth reporting? We have destroyed the United Kingdom and will end up with an

[Mr. David Amess]

English Parliament. It is all the fault of the Labour party. Since 1 May last year, it has set about destroying this Parliament, which is the centre of the greatest democracy in the world.

The Government report matters outside the House before giving us the courtesy of reporting them here. That was demonstrated by the deliberate leaking and over-egging of the Budget. I hope that we will hear no more nonsense about a lack of reporting. The answer is in the hands of the Labour party, and I hope that it will begin to take the Chamber seriously again.

12.1 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) has left me very little time. I agree with his first point about solicitors. The legal profession is shot through with any number of restrictive practices and it is one of the last great institutions crying out for reform. In the few minutes left to me I want to deal with that matter, specifically the selection of Queen's Counsel and other judicial appointments.

Before the election, the Labour party said that it would take a sledgehammer to the legal profession. In a document published in 1995 entitled "Access to Justice", we said:

"An incoming Labour government will formally refer the legal profession to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission . . . so that existing structure and practices can be tested by reference to their ability to meet consumer needs."

We have a packed legislative programme and I do not criticise the Prime Minister or the Lord Chancellor for putting this on the back burner, but at some stage it must be brought forward. We cannot allow the legal profession to regulate itself; it is very much against the public interest.

Tomorrow, Maundy Thursday, 50 or so barristers will be celebrating. It will be jackpot day for them because they will have been appointed QCs. With that appointment, they will enjoy an immediate elevation in status, stratospheric earning powers and a distinction to which many of them may not be entitled. I say that because the manner in which QCs are appointed is obscure; it is not transparent and depends upon informal soundings taken from senior members of the judiciary, senior academics and so on. It is impossible for lay people such as myself or other members of the legal profession to understand fully why some people are preferred and others are not.

The greatest number of applications made in the past 10 years by one individual, who was subsequently successful, was 15. One can only sit one's driving test five times and take one's degree once—perhaps it is twice now. One cannot sit A-levels 15 times. It is astonishing. The highest number of unsuccessful applications is 25, but the Lord Chancellor is not prepared to put a cap on it. He is relying on informal soundings from the judiciary. I would find it more encouraging if, having asked for those informal soundings, he got a 100 per cent. response rate. In fact, 37 per cent. of the senior judges could not be bothered to reply. When I asked the Lord Chancellor about that, the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), who understood my concern, said that there were no plans to urge a higher response rate.

When the QCs come to the House of Lords, as they will, to get their letters patent—I believe that that is what they are called—they undergo an investiture ceremony. They are all kitted out in a costume which consists of

"buckled patent leather shoes, silk stockings, breeches, a gown, lace around the wrist, white gloves and a shoulder length bell bottomed wig."

As the Lord Chancellor gives the new QC the grand patent of precedence as one of Her Majesty's counsel, he says:

"To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting. Know Ye that We of Our especial grace have constituted, ordained and appointed our trusty and well beloved"

Joe Bloggs, or whoever

"one of our Counsel learned in the Law."

Once a QC, always a QC. It is an indefensible system.

In yesterday's edition of *The Lawyer*, which is in the Library, there are four pages criticising the system. Peter Reeves from the Adam Smith Institute published a compelling pamphlet on the system entitled: "Silk cut are Queen's Counsel necessary?"

He is against the continuation of the institution and calls for a free market in the law and a unified legal profession where those who are skilled in advocacy or in a particular area of the law will be recognised as skilled practitioners by the market, which is what happens in every other sphere of life. We do not have Queen's architects, dentists or shoemakers, but we have Queen's counsel. It is a restrictive practice that should be done away with.

12.5 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) has obviously not heard of the royal warrant.

It is always a pleasure to take part in this debate because it gives hon. Members an opportunity to let the bees out of their bonnets. This morning we have had 17 speeches covering a wide variety of topics. I am delighted that most of those who contributed to the debate have heeded the remarks by the Modernisation Committee and are present in the Chamber for the reply. It is not inappropriate, in view of the presence of the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons to say that I was particularly glad that the last report of that Committee stressed the importance of hon. Members being in the Chamber if they have contributed to a debate. I hope that those who are not here—unless they have a good reason—will make every effort to be here in future to hear the reply to the debate.

We have covered a range of topics. The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) began by talking about the scourge of chlamydia and the need for the Government to take action. Everything she said was entirely reasonable and right. I am sure that she will agree with me, as I am agreeing with her, that one would hope that young people in this country would begin to exercise a little more restraint in sexual practices, because the one sure way of avoiding sexually transmitted diseases is not to engage in promiscuous conduct.

We had two speeches on rate capping in Derbyshire; one in the inimitable style of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and one from my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). They had slightly differing views on the issue, but they were united in believing that it was regrettable that the

Government took the action that they did. The hon. Member for Bolsover believes that it is still in the balance, and I trust that he is right. He agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire that it would be a waste of money to re-bill the electors of Derbyshire at a cost of, as I understand it, £500,000.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) spoke with force and fervour about the anti-dumping levy on unbleached cotton, not a subject on which I was previously well rehearsed. He made a good case. However, there was a certain ambivalence in his conclusion when this champion of the European Commission, having castigated its action, said what a wonderful group it was.

The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) spoke about school transport in Essex; my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) later gave a slightly corrective interpretation of that account. I cannot pretend to be an expert in Essex politics, but I agree that it is important that those who live in rural areas, especially children who go to denominational schools, should not be placed at a disadvantage.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) made an almost musical plea for the Bournemouth symphony orchestra. As one who has heard that orchestra and knows of its professional excellence and something of its wonderful work, I totally endorse his plea.

I also endorse the plea by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who spoke about the need for the Ministry of Defence to offer redundant equipment to museums before consigning it to scrap. He made an extremely powerful case for the museum at Priddy's Hard—I hope that Ministers will heed that, and that the right hon. Lady will be able to refer to it when she winds up.

The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) made a plea for a bypass for Ashby. All those who know that historic town will realise that a bypass could bring great benefits and relief, as has happened in other cases. I hope that the Government will listen to what he said.

I also hope that they will listen to the consistently powerful plea by the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for industrial workers, particularly quarrymen, who have emphysema. He has a worthy track record in the House, and I was extremely sad to hear him suggest that this might be his last Parliament. Perhaps he aspires to be the Prime Minister of Wales, or whatever that creature will be called in the assembly. I cannot wish him luck, but I can say that I have enjoyed his company and that I shall personally be delighted if he stays here for many more years. The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made a local plea, but, as he is no longer here, I shall not refer to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) made an extremely important point about the failure of the Foreign Secretary to make a statement following his recent very important tour of the middle east. Yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made a most interesting point of order on this matter. In her response, Madam Speaker made it plain that a change of policy was not necessary for a proper report to be made on a foreign tour of great importance. I hope that that will be the last time that our Foreign Secretary, who represents us all, will return from a foreign tour without addressing Parliament.

I should add at this point that I was very glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West referred to the disturbing tendency of Ministers to seem to neglect the House. Nobody can criticise the Prime Minister for not being here today, and I am sure that I speak for all hon. Members in wishing him well in his important work in Northern Ireland—we are all most anxious to see a just settlement there. I am disappointed, however, that he spends far less time listening to speeches in the Chamber and voting than any of his predecessors not only in my 28 years as a Member of Parliament, but, I believe, in this century. All parliamentarians—the hon. Member for Bolsover is one par excellence—must share that view.

The hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) made an interesting speech about the broadcasting of sporting events. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) seemed to want the channel tunnel to be filled in, but, accepting that that was not likely to happen, he made a powerful and cogent plea that the link be built properly and immediately. He talked about fruit and hospitals—perhaps there is a connection.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) spoke interestingly about road safety. I should say how good it is to see his mother, the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), next to him on the Bench. It is almost four years since Bob Cryer died so tragically, and we all still very much miss him—it is good to have two members of the family here today. In the hon. Gentleman's remarks on Europe, he showed that he was a chip off the old block, as I have said before.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West then gave a robust omnibus speech, such as he typically makes in these debates.

Five hon. Members, I think, talked about the BBC. I was delighted that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who is a considerable parliamentarian, made the BBC the sole subject of her most powerful speech. I know that there is concern throughout the House about the cavalier attitude of the chairman and governors of the BBC. Many of us believe that the BBC is violating the spirit of its charter in deliberately reducing its audience for a public sector aspect of its work that is specifically mentioned in that charter—broadcasting the proceedings of Parliament.

The way in which the BBC treated Madam Speaker's letter to the chairman was particularly discourteous. The letter, which she sent on Monday, is in the Library for all hon. Members to see. She wrote:

"on your own admission, the transfer of Yesterday in Parliament to Long Wave only is likely to halve its audience and the move of The Week in Westminster from Saturday morning to Thursday evening will cut its audience from 700,000 to 300,000. It is difficult to reconcile this reality with the rhetoric of your commitment.

As I said to you on 17 March, my concern is that the BBC is overlooking its duty as a public service broadcaster to educate as well as to entertain, is marginalising parliamentary broadcasting and is in effect seeking to withdraw from its commitment to the democratic process."

Those are powerful words, and I think that Madam Speaker fulfilled her historic role in so speaking for the House. I hope that, even at this late stage, the chairman—with whom I shall be having lunch in about half an hour—will listen to what she said, as what the BBC is doing is not good enough.

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

As the hon. Member for Bolsover said, many hon. Members—including him and me—have supported the BBC through thick and thin and have taken pride in it. I agree that the BBC now seems to pander to the lowest common denominator. As he said, it cannot take its support in Parliament for granted. The BBC would be ill advised to assume that, when licences are discussed and charters come up for renewal, the House will feel that it can support it in the future as it has in the past. I believe that, in saying that the BBC is in grave dereliction of its duty, I not only echo the words of Madam Speaker, but speak for all hon. Members.

We have had an interesting debate, as we always do on these occasions. It is always difficult to respond to so many speeches on so many diverse topics, and I apologise to those hon. Members whose contributions I have not adequately acknowledged, but it is important that the Leader of the House has her chance to respond—I am trying to stick to my promise on timing. I conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by wishing you and the whole House a very happy Easter.

12.17 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, it is difficult to reply to all the diverse points that have been raised in the debate. As he said, 17 Adjournment debates have been rolled into one. If I do not cover all the points, I shall, of course, write to hon. Members. I do not mean that as a discourtesy, nor do I complain about the number of matters that were raised, as I believe that the past two and three-quarter hours have been a very good use of parliamentary time—many individual hon. Members have been able to speak about issues either of direct concern to their constituents or of wider concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who opened the debate, talked about the impact that chlamydia can have on the lives of many women. She rightly said that there was a great deal of ignorance about the problem and that more could be done. She will know that the Department of Health has set up an expert advisory group on the matter, which will report in the near future. Ministers will consider whether to establish pilot studies, which she mentioned, and whether more work should be done on education programmes. My hon. Friend mentioned an article in a women's magazine that highlighted the problem. Such articles can serve a useful purpose in educating people about health dangers. More could be done along those lines.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) referred to the BBC and raised an issue to which I shall return. He talked also about the situation in Derbyshire. I think that he was absent from the Chamber when my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) talked about Derbyshire. It might have been beneficial to the hon. Gentleman that he was absent during my hon. Friend's speech. My hon. Friend gave a vivid account of an Adjournment debate on Derbyshire that took place some years ago. That debate was interrupted, shall we say, to put it politely. Perhaps "wrecked" would be a more accurate description. During that Adjournment debate my hon. Friend was raising the issues to which the hon. Gentleman referred today.

Both my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman mentioned that Derbyshire county council has 28 days in which to make representations. I am sure there will be strong voices from both sides of the House on this matter. I am absolutely sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will consider the issue extremely fairly.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) raised the anti-dumping levy, an issue that he has brought to the attention of the House at business questions. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government believe that in this instance the Commission has taken an unfortunate decision. We believe that there is some evidence with regard to justification for imposing the measure but we think that insufficient account has been taken of the views of member states about the direct impact on local companies.

The United Kingdom will be doing all that it can to maintain the majority against the levy, to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention. There is still some way to go. I can understand why the hon. Gentleman feels that the levy is damaging a firm in his constituency. I can give him the assurance that Ministers are well aware of the problems and are trying to raise them with the Commission as well as trying to minimise the impact that the levy will have.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) talked about home-school transport in Essex, in a succinct and telling way. He described clearly the pressures that there will be on some families in his constituency. My hon. Friend also explained the change of boundaries, which is probably important for people in the area to understand. When there are changes of boundary, it sometimes takes time for people to understand the changes in control. I hope that Essex county council will listen to what my hon. Friend has to say. It is clear that some of the specific problems in some villages or with denominational schools are pertinent to his constituents. I am sure that they will be pleased that he has spoken up on their behalf.

The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) referred to the Bournemouth symphony orchestra. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said that he had had the privilege of hearing it. I cannot make that claim, but the Government are concerned to hear that Devon county council has indicated at such short notice that it intends to withdraw its funding of £100,000. The timing of this is probably an extra problem that the orchestra has to face. I am sure that Devon county council will listen to what the right hon. Gentleman has to say. He did, of course, get the opportunity to advertise for funds. He did not quite give the phone number and address to which funds should be sent, but he certainly made the plea carefully.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) raised the millennium Portsmouth harbour project. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Ministry of Defence believes that museums such as those that he mentioned have an important role to play. I know that the hon. Gentleman has written to a Minister at the MOD. I think that he can expect a reply soon. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that every request will be considered sympathetically. If the Ministry can help, I am sure that that help will be forthcoming.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) drew attention to the bypass on the A511 that he wants. I think that the A15 and the A511 come together in his constituency. My hon. Friend will know that this is a scheme for which Leicestershire county council is the highway authority. The council has indicated an intention to start works in 1999. Any bid for Government support for the scheme will be considered following the submission, which will not be until July. I cannot comment in more specific detail on the application for the bypass.

My hon. Friend's points about the impact on local people were well made. It is a fact that road problems can have an effect on children going to school, on local employment and on issues such as tourism and buildings in Ashby. My hon. Friend raised some important points.

The right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) raised the important issue of compensation for quarrymen and gave a graphic description of the problems that have arisen. The right hon. Gentleman's real concern was evident in what he said. I know that Ministers are aware of the problems, and I will ensure that they know that the right hon. Gentleman spoke about the matter today.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) raised the issues that I think he hoped to raise at Question Time yesterday. He found that he could wind them into this debate. I make no complaint about that. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary answered the question—I thought reasonably—why there was no statement after the middle east visit. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire echoed the hon. Gentleman's comments. It is not possible to make a statement on every occasion. I think that we must rely on the judgment of Ministers, if there has not been a change of policy, when it is wise to make a statement and when it is not.

I think that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet wanted to raise the question of Cyprus yesterday. We welcome the opening of the Cyprus-European Union accession negotiations. We are hoping that rapid progress can be made, but that is obviously dependent on certain conditions. The hon. Gentleman referred also to Syria. I shall pass his "supplementary" on to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary so that he gets the extra information that he wants.

Speaking on behalf of the Select Committee on Accommodation and Works, the hon. Gentleman talked about recesses. I shall be as forthcoming as I can about recess dates. However, he will understand that this is a very busy Session. I shall bear in mind his point about the Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) talked about listed sporting events. He will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is involved in widespread consultations and has met Ministers. I am sure that many have been lobbied on sports such as cricket being included in the list. My hon. Friend's point has been well made.

The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) spoke about the channel tunnel rail link. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has kept the House well informed of what has been happening. The link is important and work is going ahead as a matter of urgency to try to resolve the situation, which clearly affects the hon. Gentleman's constituents and many others. My right hon. Friend made a statement as soon as the crisis arose, and I think that he should be commended for that. He is clearly working extremely hard to get answers.

As for beer-running and Customs and Excise, the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent will know that we reversed some of the cuts in Customs and Excise officer numbers. Putting that to one side, we want to crack down on alcohol and tobacco fraud and smuggling. There will be some announcements later in the year on other things that could happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) referred to road safety. I think that we all realise that a vicious circle often arises when parents are too frightened to send their children to school on their own—that is walking to school—and therefore use their cars to take them, which puts more cars on the road. My hon. Friend raised a serious issue that concerns many people.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) raised a series of issues, some of which affect his constituents; others were of a wider nature. I refute what he said about attitudes to Parliament. I was pleased that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman said that it was right that the Prime Minister should be in Ireland today. I hope that that is something on which we can all agree.

On the BBC, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) spoke about the letter that the Speaker had written, and, indeed, the attitude of the whole House on this issue. My hon. Friend's speech probably united everybody in the Chamber. It was forceful, which is what I would expect from her. I am sure that all of us would want to review the arrangements and monitor them ourselves. The BBC has said that it will review the matter in 12 months, but for many hon. Members, that might be too long to wait. The House will ask questions of the BBC about how many people listen to these programmes. I personally—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We must now move on to the next debate.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The subject of the next debate is of particular importance to hon. Members from constituencies throughout the United Kingdom, but particularly from Wales. Two or three infantry divisions are under threat. We should have more time in which to debate that issue. Many hon. Members from throughout—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman must know that. He is in fact taking time out of the limited amount that is available. It is the hon. Gentleman who secured the Adjournment debate who has the privilege of leading it.

Territorial Army

12.31 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The number of right hon. and hon. Members, on both sides of the House, who have taken the trouble on the last day of term to be in their places demonstrates the strength of concern felt on this subject. I am grateful to the Minister for the Armed Forces, for whom I have the highest respect, who will respond to the debate.

The Territorial Army faces a double threat: on the one hand, a cut of more than half its combat elements; on the other, an insidious move to becoming a mere support organisation for the Regular Army. Such a move would destroy its ethos and its attractions to good-quality people. Ironically, it would also reduce its ability to provide the very reinforcements that the Regular Army needs in peacetime in places such as Bosnia.

What is at stake is no less than the purpose and capability of our defence forces as a whole. Infantry, armour, artillery and combat engineer units cannot be quickly rebuilt. Unlike doctors or technicians, they have no counterparts in civilian life.

I resigned as a parliamentary private secretary and signed up to a demand for a proper strategic defence review. I would have been the very first Member of Parliament to welcome such a review if it had been carried out in the same open-minded way in which others were carried out. Other countries have recognised that, with smaller professional forces, volunteer reserve units can replace capacity in a less costly fashion than their regular counterparts. The cost today of a volunteer reserve unit is typically around a fifth of its regular counterparts. That is why our English-speaking cousins, the other main non-conscript countries—America, Canada and Australia—have all chosen to keep a volunteer reserve force, excluding regular reservists, equal to or larger than their regular armies.

In America, in December, six of the 15 higher readiness National Guard brigades began forming two divisions deployable at just 90 days readiness. In Australia, the Seventh Field Force, one of many largely territorial brigades, is being prepared for overseas projection at just 90 days' readiness, with the extra resources that it will need for that. Yet in Britain, with our TA already down to less than half the strength of our Regular Army, further cuts are planned.

The second threat is equally insidious: a change of philosophy, transforming the TA from an army-in-waiting into an organisation with a mere augmentation and support role for the Regular Army. Such an organisation exists in the United States—the US Army Reserve, which works in parallel with the National Guard. Although the US National Guard, with its formed regiments and brigades, with its fighting spirit and local connections, has the lowest wastage in the English-speaking world—the Australians come a close second—the US Army Reserve, whose units have a support and augmentation philosophy, has the worst, at a miserable 37 per cent. That is what our planners seem to want over here.

We do not have to look across the Atlantic. The Navy has already emasculated the Royal Naval Reserve. There was a letter in *The Times* on Saturday from a regular naval officer, arrogantly putting down a letter from someone who was ex-RNR, and saying how pleased the new RNR should be to have no ships and simply fill berths in regular naval vessels. What he did not say was that the RNR is now the worst-recruited part of the reserve forces and is unable to match its pathetically small new target establishment. It is appropriate that the chiefs of staff should have selected an admiral to head the relevant tri-service working party.

Time and again, volunteer reserve units have proved their worth when we sorely needed them, from the Queen Victoria Rifles, whose heroic defence of Calais when the Army was withdrawing from Dunkirk won extremely rare praise from the German high command that they were fighting, to 1990, when the National Guard Artillery Brigade, which was located next to our division in the Gulf, was commented on by our own Brigadier Hammerbeck. He said, "My God. I shall never forget their first bombardment. The enemy commander told me he'd lost 90 per cent. of his forces in the first few minutes." The highest scoring allied forces armoured unit in that campaign was the 4th US Marine Reserve Tank Battalion, commanded by a volunteer reservist. These units cost the American taxpayer a fraction of the price of their regular counterparts, which releases money for vital equipment procurement.

British TA units, such as the splendid 5 PWRR in my constituency, could do it too, if they were given the modest extra resources to raise their readiness state; indeed, many of them did so in the last war.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Will the hon. Gentleman associate the Yorkshire and Humberside Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association with his remarks concerning the unit in his constituency?

Mr. Brazier: I am delighted to do so, and to mention the proud record of Yorkshire, north-eastern regiments and regiments throughout the country, too.

Does the Minister, for whom I have the highest regard, really believe the message that he is being given by his officials in the Ministry of Defence: that British reservists are so inferior to their American and Australian counterparts that they are unable to provide proper fighting units and formations at sensible levels of readiness? He will be fully aware of how heavily infantry units in Bosnia rely on reservists. He must also be concerned that we face a further decline in the Army's profile in the wider community as the light of the last military presence winks out in areas throughout the country with the closure of territorial and cadet premises. However, those are not my main arguments. My concern is a strategic one.

Since 1815, defence planners have told Ministers that the next war would be over in a few weeks and would involve few casualties. From our own experience, in the Crimea through to the recent Russian experience in nearby Chechnya, defence planners have been proved wrong—frequently abruptly and surprisingly. The current configuration of our Regular Army, which has been reduced to just two divisions, allows us to deploy a single division in an expeditionary force. The ability to build that into a larger force depends on the combat elements of the TA.

Ministers should have asked how we can provide stronger forces within affordable budgets by harnessing the remarkable enthusiasm in the wider community. Why

has no evaluation been done of the deployable reserve brigades that America and Australia are developing? In the struggle for resources, the truth is that regular officers have squeezed the TA out and bolted it on to the backside of its regular counterparts.

When our TA infantry and yeomanry regiments cost one fifth of their regular counterparts, how can it be cost-effective to consider reducing them to a rump? The short answer is: easily—if two conditions are met. First, there must be an all-regular higher command structure of the type unique to Britain. We do not have even one TA major general, whereas the Australians have three and the Americans have one for every state. I am proud of our professional Army; I am not so proud of the clique of regular staff officers in the Ministry of Defence. I look forward to meeting some of them at the Select Committee—if our Chairman so decides.

The second condition is that there must be a belief—our planners seem, once again, to entertain that belief—that we will not have to fight a major war for many years to come. The Falklands and the Gulf wars were both fought over open terrain in areas containing virtually no civilians, but we could get sucked into serious fighting, just as the Americans did in Vietnam and the Russians did in Afghanistan and Chechnya. It could happen in Iraq or in the Baltic region, if the latter catches fire. In that case, we will need a much larger Army, and very quickly.

We cannot be secure without a proper general reserve; it must be borne in mind that our fine Regular Army has just two divisions. In some past wars, we needed more than 80 divisions. Do the Government really want the British Army to lose its capacity to expand to fight real wars, and to become a mere peacekeeper?

12.40 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) for allowing me to intervene briefly. The fact that there are so many Members here in the early afternoon is a warning to the Treasury and the Ministry of Defence that messing around with what is left of our reserves would be difficult and dangerous. The Defence Select Committee has already had two sessions on the reserves, and will certainly have more after the publication of the strategic defence review.

We are not defensive because of nostalgia or because of an attachment to the TA units that we all regularly visit. We support the TA because we feel there is still a great need for a competent reserve to supplement our armed forces. Warfare has not changed so greatly as to render our traditional reserves superfluous; nor are they there only to plug holes left in the MoD's budget.

I would ask the Minister to use his considerable influence to ensure that, when the SDR is published, there will still be a significant role for the reserves into the 21st century, the enormous financial restraints on the MOD notwithstanding. If we find that the reserves have been relegated to superfluity, I am convinced that there will be tremendous reaction throughout the country, reflected in the House. I very much hope that that can be avoided by careful planning in the MOD.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.

12.42 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on initiating the debate and engaging the support of the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who chairs the Select Committee. I speak as a relic of dad's army, who, after that service, joined the Army proper in 1942. One lesson that I learned from my father was that this country of ours never has an army large enough to withstand a major threat. That was why Lord Haldane, in the early part of the century, introduced reforms that brought the TA under the control of the Ministry of Defence.

Even today, in the absence of any major threat, the Army finds it necessary to use the services of skilled people in the TA. I find it, therefore, all the more astonishing that we should even begin to contemplate the dumbing-down of the TA and the reduction of its role in our armed forces.

There is another damaging element in play. The danger is that we will discount the voluntary spirit and the enthusiasm and ideals of people who wish to serve their country. All those virtues are well described in the publication "South-East TAVRA". We all urge the Government to spend more money on helping young people to make their lives more worth while by finding a mission or a goal with a public service spirit. By diminishing the value of our cadet forces and the TA, we may end up diminishing the value of public service itself—not to mention the effectiveness of our armed forces. That is a double whammy if ever there was one.

12.44 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on securing this important debate at such a crucial time. The Minister will have noticed that the debate is a combined operation—all the main parties are united in their support for the combat arms of the Territorial Army. The Royal Marines, in which I was privileged to serve, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force all have minimal reserves now, but, thank goodness, the TA can still deploy large formed units of battalion strength.

The TA's combat units buttress our county regiments, which are the envy of armies throughout the world. The 4th Battalion the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment has companies in Plymouth, Exeter and Dorchester, where they are a vital aid to recruitment and to our cadet service. Their combat role, however, is the most important of all.

Infantry soldiers exist ultimately for the purpose of combat. It is the team or unit that is so desperately important; at present, we still have those units. I hope that the strategic defence review will do nothing to undermine them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should perhaps tell the House that there seems to be some misunderstanding about the rules that apply to these half-hour Adjournment debates. They are essentially for the person raising the subject and for the Minister. By special permission both of the originator of the debate and of the Minister, others may also participate for a short time. That must be determined beforehand and notified to the Chair.

12.46 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): I am sorry that so many hon. Members did not get a chance to speak in this short debate. I can only suggest that, if they want to congratulate the TA, they should stand up and shout out the names of their local units, which will then be recorded.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on securing this timely debate. He is an experienced and doughty fighter for the Territorial Army, and if anyone was to be lucky enough to secure today's debate, it should have been him.

We are lucky indeed to be able to call on the hon. Gentleman's expertise and on that of other hon. Members present in the Chamber. I have listened carefully to what has been said not just this morning but throughout the past nine months.

The hon. Member for Canterbury was less than generous in his characterisation of the review. Not even the worst enemy of the Ministry could deny that this has been the most open and consultative exercise ever carried out by the MOD. It has included seminars, panels, written and oral submissions and discussions, in the Chamber and elsewhere. The TA has been involved in meetings and providing input; the hon. Gentleman has submitted papers to us as well. Only yesterday, I met yet another delegation from the TA—I am sure that it will not be the last.

I should not like anyone to gain the impression from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that the Territorial Army has not been well served. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman may wish, on reflection, to retract his implication—I am sure that he will—that there has been a conspiracy in the Navy or the Regular Army. I should like to thank all the services for the way they have approached the debate. They have not tried to defend the status quo or their own services or units. They have attempted genuinely to analyse current needs and then, irrespective of the effect on their own services, to work out a coherent configuration for our defence. That has been the purpose of the review and the starting point of our approach to the Territorial Army and all other units.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Reid: Yes; my hon. Friend can give us the name of the unit.

Mr. Rogers: I am an ex-Regular Army and ex-Territorial Army soldier. During the review, will my hon. Friend take into account the usefulness of the cadet forces in constituencies such as mine in the valley communities? They make an enormous social contribution and are a focus for community activity.

Dr. Reid: I shall indeed; my respect for and commitment to the cadet forces is well known. I do not understand how the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) has gained the impression that we are in any way diminishing the role of the cadets—we have supported them. I should like the resources that are given to them to be increased, but we must await the outcome of the review. We must not count our chickens before they are hatched, or set up straw men.

It is unfair to suggest that reservists have been excluded from work on the reserve forces. They have participated directly in the review, and, like all other service personnel, have been free to make submissions to the review team. They are freer than any other element of our armed forces to articulate their views and lobby for their cause publicly. Notwithstanding the odd major or two, many other elements of our armed forces do not have such freedom. While I appreciate the strength of hon. Members' feelings about the Territorial Army, we should not diminish the feelings of other sections of our armed forces about the traditions, expertise and capabilities that they bring to our defence output. We asked for and accepted submissions; we sought people's views, and I am grateful to those who responded.

I stress that, at this stage, no final decisions have been made on the reserves or on any other aspect of defence. Defence Ministers have drawn conclusions, based on a wide range of advice and many months' work inside and outside my Department, and with the Foreign Office, especially on security analysis. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has submitted detailed proposals to the Prime Minister and other Cabinet colleagues for collective decision. I am confident that the outcome will be good for the reserve forces, as well as for the armed forces as a whole and for the nation.

I shall respond as best I can in the limited time to some of the points that the hon. Member for Canterbury and his colleagues have made, but I make it clear that, ultimately, our force structures must be shaped by our defence needs. No one has greater respect than I for the traditions and past of our armed forces, but the point of the strategic defence review is to ensure that those units and forces form a coherent, usable and relevant structure for today and for tomorrow, and do not merely reflect the past.

When we took office and I became Minister of State, we found our regular armed forces seriously undermanned, struggling under a heavy load of day-to-day commitments and desperately lacking in the unglamorous but essential areas of lift capacity, sustainability, defence medical services and a host of other elements that are equal to the reserves in our consideration of our ultimate fighting output. Our regular forces are coupled with a large but undernourished reserve, much of which is predicated on home defence roles that should have expired with the cold war and whose chief contribution is plugging gaps, which should not exist, in our regular forces.

I believe that we can improve the situation that we inherited, and that we owe it to the regulars and the reserves to do so. We have made it clear that we recognise that our reserve forces are an important part of our defence capability. Indeed, we have paid lavish tribute to the important work being carried out by members of the reserve forces who have been deployed on operations in Bosnia. I repeat that they have done a great job, of which they and hon. Members are justifiably proud.

We are committed to making better use of our reserve forces, and I aim to ensure that they are capable, usable and relevant to our overall defence needs and the modern strategic environment. I have no doubt that the results of the review will include an imaginative and exciting blueprint for the future of the reserve forces.

We have heard much today about the need for a strategic reserve, and we recognise that the reserves could serve as the basis for expanding our forces if a major

threat emerged. I assure hon. Members that changes to our force structures that might come about as a result of the strategic defence review will enhance, rather than detract from, our operational capability.

It is essential to consider what our armed forces are likely to have to do in future.

Mr. Brazier: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Reid: I shall not give way, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

I have taken the point that we cannot predict exactly what is likely to happen. We cannot know everything about the future, but that does not mean that we should not make a sensible analysis of what might happen. Otherwise, we would need unlimited and unsustainable reserves to cover all contingencies. The hon. Gentleman supported a Government who cut defence resources by 32 per cent. during the 1990s, so he will know that we do not have unlimited resources.

An essential part of our work on the reserves has related to the impact of longer warning times and likely future missions. We may need to rebalance our forces between, for example, regular and reserve forces, or between combat units assigned to home defence and support units that are able to sustain expeditionary deployments abroad, which are likely to be a major feature of the strategic environment in which our forces have to operate. Our consideration of the balance of our forces arises from our current analysis, not from an undying respect for the past and an undying commitment not to change anything. We did not undertake the strategic defence review to create a monument to the past, but to create effective fighting capability for the future.

We recognise that the reserves have a wider role in society, other than a purely military one. I understand the points made by hon. Members in that regard, and I assure them that such factors have been taken into account.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Does my hon. Friend agree that the public become aware of the skill, efficiency and dedication of the Territorial Army through their close ties with it? For example, in May 1993, B company of the 3rd (Volunteer) Battalion, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, was the first to respond to flooding in Llandudno, Llandudno Junction and Deganwy.

Dr. Reid: I agree entirely about the nature of the link with the military. Llandudno, among other areas, has been a beacon to the nation.

The hon. Member for Canterbury drew useful international comparisons, and that with the United States National Guard is a favourite of his which is not without merits. However, he must not assume that a common language and culture with the United States and with Australia means that we should have a common regular-reserve balance of forces. The balance between regulars and reserves is driven by what soldiers may be required to do. A high proportion of a country's forces must be regular if it has a high level of day-to-day commitments and believes that it may have to deploy a substantial force quickly, as we do. I should not have to make that point for an ex-soldier of the hon. Member's experience.

We have, of course, considered battle casualty replacements, to which the hon. Member for Canterbury and others referred. He asked how we would expand forces in a new period of tension. We would need new recruits, people to train them, buildings in which to train them and a structure around which to organise them. The reserves are not the only source, but we recognise that they are an important source.

The hon. Gentleman said that a great number of United States reserves were sent to the Gulf. I should point out that they were called out compulsorily, which is against the traditions of this country. That is one of the matters which we want to consider—whether we should assume that reserves should be called out only in the event of a major war. I know that the United States Marine Corps did well, but all officers in the reserve component must be ex-regular.

Mr. Brazier: That is untrue.

Dr. Reid: I understand it to be true, and the hon. Gentleman would not want it to obtain in this country.

As far as I can see, there is great interest in this matter, which has not been unanticipated here. I am sure that the future will reflect the glorious past of the TA.

Health Deprivation (Blaenau Gwent)

1 pm

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I hope that the consultations proposed by the Minister on the reconfiguration of health trusts in Gwent will put both sides of the argument, and that the conclusion that is reached will be based on an option that is supported by the local community and also reflects the health needs of north Gwent. It would be sad if that did not happen, especially in Blaenau Gwent, which, as we all know, is the birthplace of the national health service. There—and, indeed, throughout north Gwent—the Minister's proposals are opposed by the community, local authorities and, perhaps more important, doctors, including consultants. About 50 doctors had the courage to make a public statement opposing the proposals.

I have mentioned the importance of consultation because the Minister has agreed to set up a project board to plan for the one-trust option. I know the Minister well enough to be aware that, although he has anticipated the result in some respects, he is still open-minded enough to recognise that we are in the business of real consultation. I know that he will listen, and will reach conclusions based on the evidence given to him.

My constituency, is part of north Gwent. This subject is important to the community there. Unfortunately, Blaenau Gwent is near the top of the league in terms of health deprivation. I am thinking of heart and respiratory problems, cancers, mental health problems, disability and long-term sickness, infant and standard mortality rates, and babies with a low birth weight. As the Government have recognised, deprivation is linked to those problems; indeed, it is a causal factor. Deprivation exists in abundance in Blaenau Gwent, however it is measured—in terms of low pay, high unemployment, bad housing or even low levels of car ownership.

On the one hand, the Minister seems to consider that the proposed trust areas should not break up local authority areas; on the other hand, he has given trust status to the Cynon valley. We do not oppose that decision. In fact, we applaud it, and we now ask the Minister to apply the same logic that he applied to the Rhondda-Cynon-Taff local authority area when it comes to north Gwent. If he can accept the split in the Rhondda-Cynon-Taff area, surely he can accept it in some of the Blaenau Gwent local authorities.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): My hon. Friend has made an important point about the conterminosity of health services and local authority services, and the resultant linking of primary and community health services with general health provision. We are afraid that, following the integration of trusts, resources for community and primary care will be sucked into the acute sector.

Mr. Smith: I agree. I must admit that I do not normally use such big words as "conterminosity", but I shall attempt it a little later.

The Minister will probably argue that the Cynon valley was given trust status before his recent proposals for reconfiguration. He is right, but, in our view, that argument is irrelevant. The point is that, in terms of the Cynon valley, the Minister has recognised the importance of splitting up a local authority. Trust status will enable the Cynon valley to respond effectively to local health problems. Blaenau Gwent and the Cynon valley are similar, in that they are two of the poorest communities in Wales, with some of the worst health problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) mentioned conterminosity. How important is that from a trust's point of view? In practice, patients go to the areas where they think they will be treated best. Currently, patients in Nevill Hall hospital come from all five local authority areas. It will never be possible to achieve a perfect fit between the area served by a trust and the local authority boundary.

For example, Caerphilly local health group would buy services from the Royal Gwent hospital, but in the north of the valley most patients go to Prince Charles hospital in Merthyr, while some go to University of Wales hospital in Cardiff, which is outside the area of the Gwent trust and health authority. Powys GPs often refer patients to Nevill Hall, Hereford, Prince Charles or Royal Gwent. Again, local health groups would have to deal with those trusts.

Conterminosity is relevant to the planning of services by health authorities in association with GPs and social services, but it is not relevant to the planning of delivery of those services. The GPs will dictate that.

Whether we have one trust or two, the Minister should examine the formula that determines the amount of health service provision. The present funding formula works against communities such as Blaenau Gwent, which has high levels of health deprivation and contains many people who need long-term care. The Minister should develop a system that responds to health deprivation and the need for long-term care. He should adopt a new philosophy—a philosophy in line with the socialist principles that have attracted not only the Minister but generations of people to the Labour movement.

Under the present system, all Gwent bodies fail dismally to respond to Blaenau Gwent's health problems. Let me give two examples. As the Minister will know, a couple of years ago, the Gwent community health trusts decided to reorganise mental health provision in the area—which obviously included Blaenau Gwent. A public meeting was held to protest about the plans for Blaenau Gwent. It was attended mainly by mentally ill people and their families.

One of the two members of the Gwent body who had drawn up the plans admitted that he knew nothing about Blaenau Gwent, and had not even tried to consult patients, families, friends, doctors, nurses, social services departments, Members of Parliament or anyone else with an interest in health provision in our community. People were treated with disdain. At that rowdy public meeting, the chairman of the community health trust, Bob Hudson, said to mentally ill people, "Well, folks, you've lost out." We would have lost out but for the courage of those mentally ill people, who stood up and made their voices heard. That is one example of people being treated with disdain by Gwent.

The second example arises from the recognition by Gwent health authority of health deprivation in the area. What was its response? A couple of years ago, it withdrew one of the doctors from Cwm. Once again, the local community had to raise hell to force a return to the status quo, but as with most promises by the health authority,

two years later we are still waiting for that doctor. The Gwent bodies have not understood or responded to our problems.

Under Gwent trust, which will employ approximately 10,000 people, the situation will get worse. It will be centred in Newport, in the south of the county, and will be unable to develop closer links between the providers of community care, acute care, primary care, and social services and others. In planning patient discharge, general practitioners will have great difficulty in obtaining the co-operation that they need on hospital services. If they fail to get a response at local level, they will become involved in what is historically and always will be an unresponsive bureaucracy in the south of the county, where most of the population is concentrated and where all the money goes.

I am sure that the Minister recognises that services are becoming increasingly specialised. Some are provided regionally, and as there will be limited scope for administrative savings, the main target will be the rationalisation of patient care. To deliver savings, it is likely that specialised provision will be centred on the main population centres in the south of the county. As the Minister has said, that will be a gradual process, because Nevill Hall will continue as a district hospital. Such a hospital needs a minimum critical level of special provision, including intensive therapy, pathology, radiology and back-up provision for the main treatment programmes. That involves high investment in changing methods and technology.

With such decisions in the hands of a single trust, investment in Nevill Hall will gradually be eroded. As elements of the specialist services disappear, the front-line accident and emergency provision will not be viable, because emergency facilities will be centralised, and people in the most deprived communities, such as those in Blaenau Gwent, will have further to travel.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that there will also be an impact on the people of Powys and on the GPs who refer them to hospital? That is a vital issue. I agree that Nevill Hall has high-quality facilities and that there must not be any reduction in its status.

Mr. Smith: I have already said that many GPs in south Powys refer patients to Nevill Hall. We are debating a matter that is relevant not just to the heads of the valley, to north Gwent, because its relevance extends over the border, if I may use that term, to south Powys. The distance that a patient must travel for treatment is crucial to success. Nevill Hall caters for people in south Powys, but it also provides substantial acute and community health care for local people in the six community hospitals. They extend from Tredegar, the birthplace of the national health service, to Monmouth.

In the past four years, much to the credit of Nevill Hall hospital, the number of consultants has increased from 32 to 45, and that has brought a wide range of specialties to the community. Since 1994, Nevill Hall has recruited almost as many consultants as it was allowed to recruit in the 20 years before that. It is a success story. The hospital has also successfully provided services that people in north Gwent and south Powys need, and that is what the debate is all about. It is not about creating structures but is about responding to health needs. If we fail to do that, we shall fail dismally as a Government.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the key reasons for keeping the north Gwent trust is to maintain the integrity of Nevill Hall as a district general hospital and so attract and retain the specialist staff who are attracted to it because at the moment it is a specialist centre? Does he further agree that the debate will become important in the next few months? Will the Minister be able to meet again those of us who came to see him in the Welsh Office recently to discuss the matter?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. Nevill Hall is currently an attractive hospital. Many consultants are attracted to it, partly because of the area, of which we are all justifiably proud, but we should not assume that all consultants wish to work in hospitals with 800 or 1,000 beds. Some people take a different view. A senior member of Nevill Hall told me some days ago that job interviews had been conducted with consultants, and that the one who had been invited to accept the job told the chair of the interviewing committee that he intended to withdraw his application because of the possibility of one trust serving the whole of Gwent. He did not find that an attractive proposition.

Nevill Hall has a fine record for day care, and for community hospital and other services in which it excels. That is evident from the amount of support for the north Gwent trust. One of the most important factors in patient recovery and care is the distance between a patient's home and where he is being cared for. If Nevill Hall's facilities are gradually eroded, its reason for existence, which is to serve the community, will also be eroded.

The Minister will say that my scenario is unrealistic because decisions about north Gwent will be made by the local health group. Such groups will consist of health authority officers, general practitioners, and people from social services and the local community. We are told that they will have a strategic role. However, it will be some years before local health groups have any real influence or money to spend on buying the services that they need. By that time, the services in Nevill Hall could have been whittled away, so that when the local health groups have any clout, they could face an irreversible pattern of provision.

In Gwent, the local health groups may have influence, but they will not have real power. For that they would need sanctions, such as buying services from another hospital trust, but the creation of a single trust would eliminate choice for the people of north Gwent and, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) said, for those in south Powys. The health groups would have to buy what the single trust made available for patients, who might have to travel for miles to Hereford, to the Prince Charles hospital in Merthyr or even to Gloucester. The establishment of a single trust in Gwent would create a monopoly, and that is not good.

Above all, the submission by Gwent health authority ignored the fundamental criteria that the Minister has laid down, and I am sure that he will wish to respond to that. One of them was patient choice for access to local specialist services, but the authority document does not even mention that all-important matter.

[Mr. Smith]

My hon. Friends and I would like to say much more, but we are running out of time and it is important to give the Minister time to respond. In the fine traditions of not only the Minister but the Labour movement, I am sure that he will respond positively.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on securing the debate. I hope that I shall be able to respond positively, because the debate is important.

We are dealing with the complex issue of health deprivation, and I certainly understand and share my hon. Friend's concerns about health deprivation in Blaenau Gwent and, indeed, throughout Wales. He will be aware—his speech testifies to it—that there is much to do in redressing the legacy that the Government inherited. The path to success will not always be easy, as there are difficult problems to be faced and dealt with en route, but the Government are determined to improve the health of the nation and, in particular, to deal with current inequalities in health status. They have already set in train some important measures and actions to tackle the situation, both within the health service and more broadly. Of course, there are many more in the pipeline.

As the House knows, our White Paper "Putting Patients First" sets out a programme of long-term reform and improvement for health services in Wales. In coming years, the excesses of the internal market will be progressively replaced by new programmes of co-operative activity between the health service and others, particularly local authorities. Bureaucracy will be reduced and the quality of care improved. The programmes will be reinforced by a strategy for the nation's health, details of which I shall announce shortly in a Green Paper.

We inherited a haphazard pattern of NHS trusts, which were poorly placed to respond to challenges. The trusts in Wales had been created as a result of local applications to support a market-based philosophy and to compete with each other in an attempt to drive efficiency into the system, but competition spawned unnecessary conflict and tension. It created unnecessary bureaucracy, paper chasing and haggling over minute details, rather than giving proper attention to what mattered: high-quality health services, money targeted to improve access to services, more doctors and nurses, better hospitals and modern equipment. We are determined to put right the problems of the past. A substantial reduction in the number of NHS trusts will be a significant contribution to that aim.

The decisions that I announced last week were not taken lightly. The proposal for a single trust in Gwent was based on the following reasons. First, I was keen to maintain, wherever possible—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent has pointed out, it was not possible to do it throughout Wales—conterminosity of health service provision with services provided by local authorities, particularly their social services departments.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful for the way in which my hon. Friend received the recent delegation from Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent, but does he acknowledge that local authorities that made representations to him did not make conterminosity the overriding principle, as he seems to do? Although we all agree with his wish to see more effective collaboration between health authorities, trusts and social services, the boundary should not be the overriding principle.

Mr. Griffiths: Obviously, the boundary issue is not the overriding principle, but it is important that we get these things right, particularly with regard to the important role that local authorities can have in developing and improving health care in conjunction with local health groups, new NHS trusts and, of course, the health authority.

Close collaboration is vital in providing the seamless service that patients deserve. I have to admit that I am excited about the prospects involved in the new co-operation between the NHS and local government. Joint management of a wide range of services, especially for vulnerable groups of people, will ensure that local authorities—again, wherever possible—do not have to get into business with more than one NHS trust. It is important to do that as far as possible.

Secondly, the single trust solution offers the potential for much greater sub-specialisation, so improving the delivery of specialist services for the people of Gwent. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent is keen that that should happen at Nevill Hall. I want it to happen at Nevill Hall and at the Royal Gwent. I want the two hospitals to move forward together in improving services.

Thirdly, the integration of acute, community and mental health services throughout Gwent would remove artificial boundaries between health providers. Finally, the single trust solution appears to offer potential for greater savings from a reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy. As I have made clear throughout the exercise, trust reconfiguration is not primarily about saving money, but we must ensure that as much money as possible is channelled towards direct patient care, rather than paper chasing and detailed haggling about finances and contracts.

For all those reasons, I decided to accept the Gwent health authority proposal that we consult on the single trust option. There will be a period of consultation over the summer months. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent will be heartened to know that the management board that is conducting the consultation and preparing the papers for the new trust in Gwent is headed by a councillor from Blaenau Gwent, Peter Law. I am sure that he will have every confidence that Peter Law will want to ensure that all the difficulties in health service provision that have been identified by my hon. Friend will be dealt with in bringing forward the project, which will be subject to consultation.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the consultation genuinely listen to the user groups, in particular, and to those very local authorities and other elected bodies with which we want to work in partnership, to provide the best possible health care? Will my hon. Friend be prepared to listen to those views and, indeed, if need be, to change the recommendations that are before us?

Mr. Griffiths: I shall want to ensure that, as a result of the consultation, the new trusts that I am proposing

come forward with proposals that show an identifiable gain in the delivery of health services in their areas. If they cannot show that, they will not be approved. If there is a need to change the proposals in any significant way, a completely new round of consultations will have to take place, but I want to make it absolutely clear to everyone that the merged trusts, the individual hospitals involved and the local populations will not see a diminution of health services that are currently provided.

Local health groups, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent alluded, will be vital in providing the service. They will work from a plan that has built into it improvements in health service delivery, so there will be no question of the groups facing a hospital that has lost services; that is not part of the plan.

We want to ensure that local general practitioners, social service representatives, other professionals in the health service and interested local health service bodies play a full part in ensuring that their nearest hospital is the one where services are provided for the people in their area, and that mental health and community services will be provided in a way that best meets the needs of local people. That is the whole purpose of carrying through the trust reconfiguration. Anything less would fly in the face of our commitments to put right the wrongs of the past and to improve health services.

On resource allocation, we are currently reviewing the allocation formula to ensure that it takes account of best practice elsewhere and of relevant data on health need. The working group has not yet reported its findings to me, but it may recommend changes to the current formula or the introduction of a new approach. At this stage, it is not possible to say exactly what will happen, but I believe that we could introduce a wider range of variables into the formulae that take account of particular health circumstances.

The future health service will be different. Local health groups will have a fundamental role in defining and commissioning primary, community and secondary care. They will commission local health care from the NHS trusts. The trusts will simply retain their existing responsibilities for providing services according to the commissioners' requirements. The doctors, health care professionals and local authority social services departments will decide what services they want from the trust.

Mr. Edwards: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Griffiths: Much as I would like to give way, I cannot, because I am in the last minute.

We shall soon publish a Green Paper focusing on the development of a public health strategy. We shall seek to improve the health of people in Wales—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The Minister will have to give way now, because we must move on to the next subject.

Mrs. Stephanie Atkinson

1.30 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of the Legal Aid Board and its actions—or more particularly, its inactions—in the case of my constituent Mrs. Stephanie Atkinson.

Mrs. Atkinson was divorced in 1991. At that time a settlement was agreed allowing her to remain in the marital home. She acquired her husband's share of the equity and accepted responsibility for the mortgage, while Mr. Atkinson retained the benefit of two endowment policies. After the divorce, Mrs. Atkinson obtained part-time employment, and was in receipt of income support for a period. Because of the payment of that benefit, the Child Support Agency intervened, requesting that Mr. Atkinson increase his maintenance payment for the two children of the marriage—two boys aged 14 and 12.

Using different solicitors from those who had acted for him over the divorce, Mr. Atkinson attempted to have the original divorce settlement set aside, seeking new terms less advantageous to my constituent, which involved, among other things, the transfer of a share of the equity in the marital home to him. Mrs. Atkinson resisted that, and the matter went to court in Bury St. Edmunds, where, on 8 April 1994, it was decided that there was no case to be heard. The costs of the action were awarded against Mr. Atkinson.

Mr. Atkinson undertook that attempt to alter the original divorce settlement for his own benefit. Mrs. Atkinson's refusal to accept the proposed change was vindicated by the court. In bringing the action, Mr. Atkinson received legal aid, perhaps because he had been out of work for a period following the divorce. However, he was working again by April 1994.

The problem facing my constituent stems from the fact that the Legal Aid Board has a charge over her house resulting from the original divorce settlement. As the charge was not registered until after 1994, she did not know the precise amount until recently. She incurred legal costs of just over £3,000 at the time of the divorce. If she sells her home, she will have to repay that sum to the board. That aspect of the matter is not in dispute, and has always been accepted by Mrs. Atkinson.

Following Mr. Atkinson's subsequent action, the board is seeking to enforce the charge over Mrs. Atkinson's home in the larger sum of about £5,500. That sum appears to include Mr. Atkinson's legal costs from his unsuccessful 1994 action and interest, which is accruing daily at 8 per cent. per annum even on the additional disputed sum relating to Mr. Atkinson's costs.

The Legal Aid Board is seeking to recover from Mrs. Atkinson the costs that were incurred by Mr. Atkinson in an unsuccessful attempt to improve his position at her expense. That is a clear and serious breach of natural justice. Mrs. Atkinson did not initiate the action. Her refusal to accept a change to the original settlement was justified, yet she is required to pay the costs of her ex-husband's legal action, despite the fact that his income is now significantly higher than hers.

Mrs. Atkinson explained the circumstances to me in March last year at my constituency surgery. She is supporting herself and her two sons through full-time

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

employment, and is doing everything she can to avoid becoming a burden on the taxpayer or on anyone else. She is naturally dismayed at having to meet her ex-husband's legal costs.

After our initial meeting, I contacted the Land Registry to seek the removal of the charge that the Legal Aid Board had over her house. As Mrs. Atkinson does not dispute that some money would be payable to the Legal Aid Board if she sold her home, the removal of the charge is not possible. I also contacted people at the Cambridge area office of the Legal Aid Board, who explained that, if they could not recover the costs of the second action from Mr. Atkinson, they would seek to recover them from Mrs. Atkinson. The charge over her home would have to be increased by the amount of the potentially uncollected costs.

In April last year, Mrs. Atkinson made it clear that she did not feel that the Legal Aid Board had made sufficient effort to recover the costs from her husband. I share that view, and conveyed it to the Cambridge office of the Legal Aid Board in a letter on 7 April. The reply simply suggested that, if she was dissatisfied with the board's efforts to recover costs from Mr. Atkinson, she could pursue the matter through its complaints procedure.

After the general election, I contacted the Legal Aid Board head office in London, who wrote to me on 1 July confirming that £1,884.63 of the costs related to Mr. Atkinson's unsuccessful action, and that interest was accruing on those costs. In August, I was informed that the relevant file, which should have been kept by the Cambridge area office, had been destroyed, making it difficult to determine whether the value of the endowment policies that Mr. Atkinson retained after the divorce had been taken into account when the board decided not to pursue him for the recovery of his costs.

I was also concerned to learn that, if Mr. Atkinson had used those endowment policies as security for the purchase of a further home after his divorce, the board would not be entitled to take their value into account when assessing his means for enforcement purposes. That is another serious injustice. Although Mr. Atkinson can shelter his assets to prevent the Legal Aid Board from recovering legal costs from him, Mrs. Atkinson—the innocent party—cannot take similar action. I hope that the Minister will comment on that injustice.

On 12 August, the Minister wrote me a general letter, which did not directly address the issues raised by the case. A further letter from him on 22 September added little to his earlier reply. I have read those letters again this morning, and I find it hard to believe that he read either of my letters to him about the case before sending his replies.

At that point, the Minister asked the chief executive of the Legal Aid Board to contact me. On 19 September, I received a letter containing the extraordinary assertion that the board was not trying to recover from my constituent the costs that had been incurred by Mr. Atkinson. If that assertion was remotely true, I would not need to raise the matter now.

The chief executive of the Legal Aid Board agreed to re-examine the matter of the endowment policies. By that time, I was able to confirm that the policies were not linked to the purchase of another home by Mr. Atkinson—information that had originally been given to the Legal Aid Board, at the beginning of 1997, by Mrs. Atkinson's solicitors.

Although I was assured that I would be kept informed, the trail went cold for almost three months before the Legal Aid Board wrote again, suggesting that Mrs. Atkinson could take action against Mr. Atkinson to recover those costs. However, the board's own view was that it would not be cost-effective for the board itself to do so.

Not only was no reason given to explain why Mrs. Atkinson, rather than the board, should have to take the action, but the suggestion completely overlooked the fact that Mrs. Atkinson is understandably reluctant to initiate an action against her former husband, for fear of the damage that it might to do to their already fragile relationship, the nature of which leaves her extremely vulnerable to retaliation.

There the matter now rests—a situation which is worthy of Charles Dickens. My constituent—a divorced mother, struggling to support herself and her two children—is faced with supine bureaucracy on all sides. When her former husband attempted to vary the terms of a previously agreed divorce settlement to her disadvantage, she wished to protect her position and that of her children. The court found in her favour, but the Legal Aid Board still required her to meet the costs of her husband's failed action.

The same board—having destroyed a file that was clearly still active, and having requested information that had been supplied to it months earlier—has, after a further three months' delay, decided that it is unable, for reasons that are completely unexplained, to take any action to recover the costs from Mr. Atkinson. The sums may not seem enormous to the board, but they are of great significance to my constituent.

Two issues of principle are also involved. First, my constituent should not be expected to pay the costs of an action—which she won—brought against her by her ex-husband for his own purposes. Secondly, it is wrong for the board, with all the resources at its command, to suggest that my constituent should have to initiate the recovery action against her former husband. It was the board's failure to act that caused the problem initially.

I should be grateful if the Minister would address those two issues. I am sure that he will agree that the system should not operate so obviously to the disadvantage of my constituent.

Thirdly, I should be grateful also if the Minister will also explain just what action the Legal Aid Board has taken to try to recover Mr. Atkinson's costs from him. As the Minister knows, the board has a statutory duty to recover money expended on a legally aided case. So far, the board seems to be interpreting that duty in an extraordinarily one-sided manner, by looking exclusively to Mrs. Atkinson for its costs.

As my third request was not in the draft of my speech, which I sent to the Minister's office, I shall understand if he would prefer to write to me with a detailed answer to it.

Finally, and in any event, I shall be grateful if the Minister will now assure me that the Legal Aid Board will make a proper attempt to recover from Mr. Atkinson the costs incurred by him, so that the burden of those costs does not fall on my constituent.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I thank the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for the clarity of his speech, setting out the position of his constituent Mrs. Stephanie Atkinson. I also thank him for his courtesy in sending me a copy of his speech in advance of today's debate. However, I am disappointed that the detailed explanations provided in my letters to him and in those of the Legal Aid Board have not yet satisfied him. Nevertheless, I shall endeavour to clarify the position once and for all.

I emphasise that my explanation today will not differ in substance from that which I gave in writing to him on 12 August and 22 September 1997. I had read all the relevant correspondence before writing to him on each of those occasions.

Decisions on civil legal aid are made in accordance with the law by the Legal Aid Board, a body which is independent of ministerial control. It is an important principle that such decisions are, and are seen to be, free from political or governmental interference.

The specific case that the hon. Member for South Suffolk has raised was a matrimonial dispute in which both parties were legally aided. Both were therefore of limited financial means. Before legal aid is granted, an applicant must pass both a means test and a merits test, which are conducted by the board in accordance with relevant legislation. An applicant must qualify financially for civil legal aid, by satisfying the Legal Aid Board that his or her income and capital are within current financial limits. It is worth noting that the board will not take into account any matrimonial assets that are the subject of a dispute.

An applicant must also show that he or she has reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to proceedings, and that it is reasonable in the specific circumstances of the case for legal aid to be granted. That is known as the merits test. The board must consider, for example, whether the case has a reasonable chance of success, whether the benefits of litigation would outweigh the cost to public funds, and whether the applicant would receive any significant personal benefit from proceeding, bearing in mind any liability to repay the costs if successful.

Those factors are similar to those which would influence a privately paying client when considering whether to become involved in legal proceedings. In the case raised by the hon. Gentleman, both parties satisfied the means and merits tests, and both were granted legal aid.

Any case before the court, whether privately funded or legally aided, may result in costs being awarded against the losing side at the end of proceedings. The decision on the award of costs lies with the court, which has wide powers of discretion to direct what costs should be paid and by whom. The general rule is that the losing party will pay the winning party's reasonable costs.

In this case, the judge awarded Mrs. Atkinson costs in the amount of £1,884.63 because of the second action brought by Mr. Atkinson, when he attempted unsuccessfully to vary the divorce settlement. Those were Mrs. Atkinson's reasonable costs in resisting his application to the court. In principle, she would have had to meet those costs regardless of whether she was legally aided.

There are certain special rules on costs in relation to a legally aided party, as there would be little point in making an order for costs against someone who is eligible for legal aid—who is, by definition, of limited means. The court therefore stated that the order for costs could not be enforced without leave of the court. The decision was made under section 17 of the Legal Aid Act 1988, which limits costs against legally aided parties.

The Legal Aid Board considered the matter of enforcement of the costs order. As I said, under the law, the order cannot be enforced without leave of the court—which, in this case, would have to make a determination of Mr. Atkinson's ability to pay. Any application made to the court would require documentary evidence to show that the person's financial circumstances had improved since the original hearing. Originally, Mr. Atkinson must have been granted legal aid on the basis that he was of limited means, and therefore unable to meet any order for costs.

When the board is considering whether to pursue a costs order, it has to consider whether such action would prove cost-effective. The board would have to consider the amount that could be recovered from Mr. Atkinson, and the costs of instructing an agent firm of solicitors to perform the work. Moreover, it should be emphasised that, if the action were not successful, Mrs. Atkinson would become legally liable to pay any additional costs incurred.

I understand that the chief executive of the Legal Aid Board has written to the hon. Member for South Suffolk explaining the position. I have also requested a full report on the case. However, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, if he is not satisfied with the responses that he has received from the board, he may refer the case to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

It is important to emphasise that, in principle, at the end of any case, it is for each side to pay their own solicitors' costs. That is the position in principle, regardless of whether the parties are legally aided. Although the successful party may recover his or her reasonable costs against the losing party, in most cases, not all the actual costs are recovered. The balance will still have to be paid by the winner.

In cases where the client is legally aided, the solicitor will receive payment from the Legal Aid Board, which, under the law, will then have to recover its costs from the solicitor's client directly, through a process known as the statutory charge. That charge means that, if, as a result of the case, the legally aided client preserves or wins anything, the Legal Aid Board can recover any deficit from what has been preserved or recovered.

The statutory charge applies irrespective of the personal circumstances of the assisted party, and ensures that the legally aided person is placed as far as possible in the same position as an unassisted party, whose responsibility at the end of the case is to pay any of their own legal costs that have not been paid by the other side.

It is important to appreciate that the Legal Aid Board has no discretion to waive the statutory charge under section 16 of the Act. Section 16(6) of the Legal Aid

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

Act 1988 makes it clear that the first charge will be for the benefit of the board on any property that is recovered or preserved in the proceedings.

Mrs. Atkinson retained an interest in the marital home, which it was decided had a value of £20,000. It was therefore necessary under the law to apply the statutory charge to the property in order to recover the total legal costs paid on her behalf, including the sum that Mr. Atkinson was ordered to pay to her.

I should emphasise that the statutory charge will apply only to Mrs. Atkinson's legal costs. She has not been asked to pay any of Mr. Atkinson's legal costs. The statutory charge has been an essential feature of the legal aid system since it was established in 1949. Indeed, the hon. Member for South Suffolk may remember that he voted for the legislation that is enshrined in the Legal Aid Act 1988.

It should be noted that the legal aid scheme is designed to put assisted parties on the same footing as privately paying parties wherever possible. As a result, assisted parties are required to pay a contribution, when appropriate, and to repay to the legal aid fund any moneys they receive in the course of the proceedings. Even parties who have received non-contributory legal aid are subject to the statutory charge. In effect, where an assisted person is wholly or partly successful in recovering or preserving goods or properties, the operation of the statutory charge converts legal aid from a gift to a loan.

I am aware that the immediate imposition of the statutory charge can cause undue hardship. For that reason, a legally aided party may, if necessary conditions are met, postpone the operation of the statutory charge. A condition of postponement is, however, the payment of interest. In order to postpone the charge, the legally aided person must agree in writing to pay interest over the period of the postponement.

The rate of interest charged by the Legal Aid Board is 8 per cent. per annum simple interest—not, I emphasise, the compound interest charged by many mortgage lenders. The board has no discretion under the law to waive interest. In contrast, privately paying clients may have to take out a loan to pay their legal advisers, and would be paying a commercial rate of compound interest.

If postponement of the charge is permitted, as in this case, the legally aided person is, in fact, in a better position than a privately paying client, since there is no requirement to sell the property in order to repay the loan. The loan may not be paid back for many years—until, for example, the legally aided party chooses to sell. A private client, however, would be expected to pay their legal costs immediately. When the statutory charge is paid by instalments, the board normally expects a minimum of £25 per payment. The payments are first used to cover any outstanding interest, but any residue reduces the amount of the charge.

The operation of the statutory charge and the accrual of interest should not come as a surprise to someone who is legally aided. From the outset of the case, the solicitor should explain the charge and the possible effects as the case proceeds. The legally aided person should also be given a leaflet, produced by the board, which explains the operation of the statutory charge. When the legally aided person signs the legal aid application form, he or she acknowledges that the charge has been properly explained to them. Mrs. Atkinson signed an agreement on 17 January 1994 to postpone the charge and to pay interest.

Although application forms contain warnings about the effect of the charge, the board is firmly of the view that it is the solicitor's responsibility to ensure that the client is kept fully informed about its implications throughout the case. As with all legal aid payments, the solicitor's costs and counsel's fees are paid out of the legal aid fund, not out of the charge.

I apologise for the technical explanation of the case. It is unfortunate that the devil is in the detail of the matter. Only by explaining the detail can the facts in this unfortunate case be properly understood. I hope that the hon. Member for South Suffolk now properly understands both the law and the facts of the case.

Mr. Yeo: As we still have a moment or two left, I should like to express my disappointment at the Minister's reply. Although he set out the principles on which legal aid can be granted, and although he explained in some detail—which I was able to follow—the circumstances under which interest is charged, and so on, those are not the matters that have caused the greatest concern to my constituent.

We were aware that there would have to be repayment of costs that arose in the original divorce settlement. There was clearly a gain of property because Mrs. Atkinson received a share of the equity in the marital home—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot speak twice in the debate. He must make a brief intervention.

Mr. Yeo: The substance of my constituent's concern—and my concern—is the failure of the Legal Aid Board to carry out its statutory duty to recover costs in an even-handed way. It is taking the easy route by using its charge on my constituent's property to recover costs. It does not appear to be making any attempt to recover costs from Mr. Atkinson. I hope that the Minister will at least write to tell me what steps the board intends to take to recover costs from Mr. Atkinson.

Mr. Hoon: I have sought to explain to the hon. Gentleman the particular problem, which is that both parties at the outset were legally aided. In those circumstances, the law requires that very careful consideration be given before any procedures are used to enforce payment of costs by a legally aided party. I explained carefully that there is little purpose in cost orders against legally aided parties, since, by definition, having qualified for legal aid, they are unlikely to have sufficient funds to meet any order for costs. That was the position at the conclusion of the second case.

Thereafter, the hon. Member for South Suffolk might make a good point if he were able to point to substantial assets that Mr. Atkinson had. The difficulty that the Legal Aid Board faces is that, if there is

evidence that Mr. Atkinson had sufficient funds to meet the order for costs, the Legal Aid Board has to instruct solicitors to act against him in order to recover those costs. Someone has to pay for those proceedings. The person who might have to pay, particularly if the proceedings go wrong, is Mrs. Atkinson.

In the exercise of its judgment, the Legal Aid Board decided that it would not be appropriate to expend more of her money—it is, in effect, her money, because it would come out of the statutory charge—in order to pursue Mr. Atkinson in what might well turn out to be entirely fruitless proceedings, further aggravating the problem that the hon. Gentleman has set out. That is why the Legal Aid Board chooses not to pursue someone like Mr. Atkinson in the absence of any clear evidence of sufficient resources to meet any order for costs.

It being before Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

"Partnership for Equality"

1. **Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What responses she has received to the Government's White Paper "Partnership for Equality". [36889]

4. **Mr. Tony McNulty** (Harrow, East): What responses she has received to the Government's White Paper "Partnership for Equality". [36892]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tony Worthington): To date, two formal responses have been received to the consultation proposals in the White Paper "Partnership for Equality", but the three-month consultative period will end on 12 June 1998.

Dr. Godman: We all know why the Secretary of State and, indeed, the Prime Minister are absent this afternoon. I am sure that I speak for everyone when I say that we wish them well in their remarkable endeavours to bring about a tolerable accommodation among the participants in the talks.

Turning to the laddie from Clydebank, may I say that I appreciate talk about setting up an equality commission, but I hope that my hon. Friend is going to tell me that there will be a harmonisation of legislation relating to fair employment, gender, sex and disability. I remind my hon. Friend that one in six adults in Northern Ireland are disabled. What is the White Paper going to do for them?

Mr. Worthington: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and associate myself with those relating to the efforts of the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). No three people could be doing more to bring about an historic and honourable settlement than they are, and we wish them well.

If, after the consultation period, the Government go ahead with an equality commission, one of the biggest steps that we shall take will be to make it the duty of every Government Department to show how its policies are promoting equality of opportunity, which will benefit all the eight groups of people who suffer the risk or the reality of being disadvantaged. The Departments' efforts will be supplemented by a powerful, independent equality commission. I trust that my hon. Friend, and my neighbour in constituency terms, is reassured by those remarks.

Mr. McNulty: In light of what my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) said in his supplementary question, may I exhort all hon. Members who contribute to this Question Time to choose their words carefully so as not to impinge on what is happening in Belfast as we speak?

As for the White Paper, may I first have an assurance that the opinions of all those who respond by the end of the three-month period will receive due consideration? Secondly, will the Minister explain how the new legislation outlined in the White Paper will build on the fairness-at-work legislation?

Mr. Worthington: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and the wisdom of his initial words.

The equality White Paper seeks to build on what the report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights said about the progress that has been made in achieving fair employment over the past few years. However, enormous problems remain to be tackled in terms of community unemployment differentials, and that must be the centre point of our efforts in future. Our new deal, which was successfully launched on Monday in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, will be tackling that unemployment, and all the equality measures in the White Paper are aimed at making Northern Ireland a conspicuously fair society.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Minister accept that the new deal launched earlier this week has been widely welcomed in Northern Ireland; that that major initiative will lead to greater equity of treatment, fairness and justice than has existed in the past; and that it will provide those who are presently unemployed with the opportunity to compete in the job market, and help them to get out of the benefit trap and overcome the disadvantage and deprivation they have suffered in the past? Does he agree that those who are presently unemployed must take those opportunities and help themselves? Does he also agree that the high birth rate in Northern Ireland and continuing terrorism make it difficult to attract sufficient new investment to create jobs and equal opportunities for all?

Mr. Worthington: What will help Northern Ireland above all are a peaceful society and an honourable and just settlement, which can be arrived at this week. That is the best message possible for fairness in employment and prosperity.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments on the launch of the new deal, and thank him and his party for their support for the new deal. Nearly 1,000 firms have shown an interest in the new deal; 85 groups came forward to be appointed as consortiums and we have chosen 26, many of which are local district councils or further education colleges. I am confident that that response means that we have the framework to enable us seriously to tackle unemployment problems, currently especially among young people, but progressively among other people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): In connection with the new deal, has the Minister taken into consideration the point made by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) about the birth rate in Northern Ireland, which, at about 5.4 per cent., is higher than that in the Republic of Ireland and three times the European average? Is the Minister aware that, in Londonderry alone, 3,000 new jobs a year would be needed simply to maintain the current rate of unemployment? What plans

has he in hand to deal with that issue, which is fundamental to the disparity in employment between the two communities?

Mr. Worthington: We propose, in all our policies, to increase the number of jobs. That is what we started to do on Monday, and we shall continue our efforts over the coming months.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): May I welcome the publication of the White Paper "Partnership for Equality", which provides the evidence that better child care facilities and education and training in preparation for the job market lessen the discrimination between the Northern Ireland communities? Does my hon. Friend agree that, in publishing that document, the Government have provided a framework for further improvement in all those areas?

Mr. Worthington: I certainly welcome my hon. Friend's comments. The equality document is but one part of the whole equation that we have to put in place. I expect to announce in May the Northern Ireland child care strategy to mirror the national child care strategy, and to further the good start that we have made in the matters my hon. Friend mentions.

Beef Ban

2. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What progress is being made in lifting the ban on beef exports from Northern Ireland. [36890]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tony Worthington): The Government are pleased that the proposals for an export certified herd scheme were accepted by a qualified majority at the Agriculture Council on 16 March. The next step in restoring exports of beef from Northern Ireland is for European Commission officials to carry out an inspection in Northern Ireland of all aspects of the ECHS. That inspection is likely to take place in the week commencing 20 April, when I expect that we shall be given a clean bill of health. The Commission will then set a date for the resumption of exports of Northern Ireland beef. While I recognise that market conditions are difficult, I am confident that the Northern Ireland industry can cope with the challenges on the basis of quality and reputation.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank the Minister for that reply. Can he give the House an indication of when the ban might be lifted and what assessment he has made of the impact of lifting the ban on the wider economy of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Worthington: To take the second point first, the beef industry and agriculture in general are hugely important within Northern Ireland. When we succeed in getting the ban lifted and exports flow again, it will give a remarkable and welcome boost to the economy of Northern Ireland. I cannot give a definitive time scale for the lifting of the ban, which will depend on the European Union inspection of our procedures for the export certified herd scheme. We hope that the report of the visit will be submitted soon after the inspection, and it is conceivable—I only say conceivable—that exports could resume by mid-May.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): I thank the Minister for indicating that the ban will, hopefully, be lifted in a short time. Does he realise that a large marketing effort will be needed to gain back the exports that we have lost, which will require considerable expense? Is the Department prepared to help to get those markets back by putting money into marketing? Furthermore, as a result of the ban being lifted, there will be more flagged herds, which means that farmers who have such herds will be at a greater loss. Will the Department help in those two difficult areas by putting in more money?

Mr. Worthington: The hon. Gentleman's points were well made. We realise the significance of the issue to agribusiness in Northern Ireland, which is responsible for 60,000 jobs. I can assure him that both the International Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit will do all they can to assist with the whole initiative we need to take to restore markets for Northern Ireland beef.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley and Holderness): The Opposition obviously welcome what the Minister has said, but can he say more about procedures after the inspection? In other words, is the Standing Veterinary Committee to be consulted? If that is the case, he will obviously know that the industry will be disappointed because it will clearly result in more delay. Does he further agree that this is not the end of the problem? Let us consider prices. In Holland, a kilo of beef sold for 220p in 1996, whereas it now sells for 150p. That is good for sales, but bad for profitability. What is the Minister going to do about it?

Mr. Worthington: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. After the catastrophe caused by BSE in the British beef industry—a catastrophe that could have been avoided—a long, slow, hard and determined effort will be needed to win back business. As for the procedure, we are talking about European Union officials and they will report back to the Commission, which will then decide when the ban is to be lifted. If the hon. Gentleman would like me to write to him about the specific details and procedures, I shall be only too pleased to do so.

Multi-party Talks

3. **Mr. John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington): If she will make a statement on progress in the all-party talks. [36891]

5. **Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): If she will make a statement on the current peace talks. [36893]

7. **Mr. Andrew Hunter** (Basingstoke): If she will make a statement on the all-party talks. [36895]

9. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): If she will make a statement on progress in the multi-party talks. [36897]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): After two years of negotiations, and under the skilful guidance of Senator Mitchell, the participants are in the final stages of reaching a comprehensive political agreement. On Tuesday morning, Senator Mitchell tabled a draft paper for discussion in the talks. The paper is predominantly a synthesis of the views of the parties and the two Governments, and aims to satisfy as many people as possible.

It is not surprising that differences have emerged between the parties, but those are matters to be resolved within the talks. In that context, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that he will do all he can to help the parties to reach agreement, and that is exactly what he and the Taoiseach are doing at present.

I am sure that the House will want to join me in sending our condolences to Mr. Ahern on the death of his mother and in expressing our appreciation of his continued involvement in the talks at this sad time.

The parties have shown leadership and courage to bring us to this point. I have no doubt that they will renew their efforts as we move towards the end of the negotiations. We owe it to the people of Northern Ireland to reach an agreement which will provide a peaceful and stable society, for which so many people have worked over the years.

Mr. McDonnell: By way of introduction, I should say that we have all been aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has borne the brunt of the talks for the past 10 months in most difficult personal health circumstances, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to convey my and, I am sure, all hon. Members' thanks to the Secretary of State for bearing that brunt, and for her commitment to securing what we hope will be an historic negotiated settlement tomorrow.

May I also convey the need, after tomorrow, for the maintenance of a momentum towards peace—considering deadlines for dealing with issues, such as the situation of political prisoners in Northern Ireland and their future release, the demilitarisation of the six counties, reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the empowerment of the new democratic structures, which I hope will enable us to hear the united voice of the Irish people?

Mr. Ingram: I am sure that the whole House will share the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend about the efforts, energy and commitment that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has put into the negotiations, not only during the past 10 months, but in her previous role as shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. She has been fully engaged with the process during that period.

My hon. Friend asks about the momentum and the need to continue a process beyond this. The House will realise that peace is not an event but a process, and the process will begin following the signing of any agreement, which we hope will take place within the next 36 hours or so. I have no doubt that that will be a complicated agreement, but it is one that everyone must ensure is implemented in full, and it can be implemented in full only with the whole-hearted support of the people of Northern Ireland and all hon. Members.

Mr. Winnick: As we all hope agreement will be reached, shall we praise not only, of course, the representatives of the British and Irish Governments, but Senator George Mitchell, who has undoubtedly dedicated so much effort to trying to secure a negotiated agreement? Does my hon. Friend agree that, if there is one message today above all others that should go out, it is that all the parties involved in the talks should continue until agreement is reached?

Mr. Ingram: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the role played by Senator George Mitchell. Of course, many others have played an important role, such as the co-chairmen who have worked alongside him in chairing the talks proceedings and the independent commission on decommissioning. It is important that we continue on the basis that he has described, and that is exactly what is happening in Belfast at this moment.

Mr. Hunter: Although I greatly hope that agreement can be reached this week, will the Minister explain why, in less than three months from being broadly accepted, the heads of agreement paper has come to be regarded as a blueprint pointing towards the creation of a united Ireland?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman refers to the heads of agreement document, but the process has moved on since then. That document is a matter for discussion within the talks, and the important talks that are taking place in Belfast at this moment have been framed around that particular document. It is for the talks' participants to determine and structure the best way forward, and on that we wish them godspeed.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister will be aware that there are awkward squads in the Labour party which are opposed to changes in single parent benefits and have views on spending limits that are different from those of Front-Bench spokesmen. However, wherever one goes, a characteristic within the Labour party is the popularity of the views of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Front-Bench team, and the work they are doing to achieve peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Everything needs to be done to support those moves and to encourage the politicians involved in the talks on all sides to reconcile their different positions and reach an agreement that we can all support, and which will be supported in referendums throughout the whole of Ireland.

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. As someone who has been closely engaged in this whole process over many years, he has been a positive player in trying to bring about a better society in Northern Ireland. He has made his contribution towards achieving a peaceful and lasting settlement there.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Is the Minister telling us that he is not aware of the assumption now spreading across Northern Ireland that the draft agreement presented to the Stormont talks participants on Monday evening is so outrageous in its terms and content that it could not possibly be considered as the real paper, and that a second authentic and watered-down version of that document will be presented before tomorrow's deadline? The assumption is that it is an attempt to convince people that considerable concessions have been made to the

Unionist position, especially in regard to articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, and an attempt to blackmail the Ulster Unionist party into accepting the unwarranted interference in the government of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ingram: I would not want to respond to assumptions or perceptions. That has been part of the problem of trying to move the process forward. We have to deal with the realities, which is what the talks participants are doing at this very moment. They are trying to deal with the harsh realities and with the various papers coming before them. They are having to reconcile their differences in order to reach an eventual agreement.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): My hon. Friend the Minister has been part of the team trying to get a solution to the problem. He will be aware that there are splinter elements within Northern Ireland which do not want to see a solution to the problem, as evidenced in Londonderry last night. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Royal Ulster Constabulary and, particularly of late, the Garda Siochana, on their recent success in intercepting material for planned terrorist attacks that could have had devastating consequences on the mainland of Britain?

Mr. Ingram: Every time there has been a murder or a bombing attempt, it has been said from the Dispatch Box—we cannot repeat it often enough—that there are brave men and women in the RUC, the Garda Siochana and the security forces north and south of the border. Over recent weeks, they have stopped major bombing attempts in Northern Ireland and, most recently, in Great Britain. They have our heartfelt thanks for all their efforts in that regard.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I reiterate how pleased we are that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is not here today. I am sure that the Minister agrees that her presence in Northern Ireland, together with the Prime Minister, underlines the commitment of all hon. Members in the Chamber to a peaceful resolution to the talks. In that spirit, will the Minister encourage the Unionist politicians to consider seriously taking up their places on the British-Irish inter-parliamentary body, given that there is no cost to them in doing so and that it would enhance their influence enormously in north-south questions which they consider to be of great importance—and I agree with their assessment?

Mr. Ingram: I will not comment on where I would rather the Secretary of State was, but I am sure that what she is doing is immensely important. That is what we have been talking about today. The hon. Gentleman's serious point is a matter for individual political parties. I am sure that the Ulster Unionist party will have heard the hon. Gentleman's sentiments and will have taken careful note of them.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I am sure that all hon. Members must want peace in Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute to the Minister and the Secretary of State for their hard work in pursuit of peace. Does he accept that peace must be built on solid foundations? During the talks, Sinn Fein-IRA, among others, has continued to talk peace while it has—week in, week out—been involved in punishment beatings as well as some murders, as the Minister knows. Will he reassure the House that he will not pursue peace at any price?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that two parties participating in the talks were removed from the proceedings because it was adjudged that they had breached the Mitchell principles. Those parties were readmitted to the talks by the other participants on the basis of the best available security advice—from the security forces and the Chief Constable—about their actions as political parties with links with paramilitary and terrorist groups.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I begin by wishing, on behalf of Opposition Front Benchers, all those involved in the final stage of the talks process well in their search for a successful outcome before tomorrow's deadline. The Conservative party, as much as all the participating parties, would welcome a settlement.

In the heads of agreement that were issued—and apparently supported—by the Government on 12 January, the north-south relationships of strand 2 were to be essentially consultative and accountable to the new Northern Ireland assembly. Judging by the reaction of the Ulster Unionist and Alliance parties, it seems that the Mitchell paper issued this week has resurrected the idea that was rejected long ago of north-south bodies with executive powers. Why do the Government appear to have changed their position on that issue? Do they now favour a council of Ministers which will have executive powers and be completely independent of an assembly?

Mr. Ingram: I welcome what the hon. Gentleman said in wishing every success to the current discussions—I am sure that that view is echoed throughout the House. He asks a specific question about discussions that are taking place as he asks the question and I seek to answer it—the matter is currently being debated by the participants round the table. He will be only too well aware that Senator Mitchell asked talks participants not to disclose the contents of his paper, so that it did not become the basis of a media circus rather than the focus of real discussions round the negotiating table. We are at a tense and sensitive time in the process, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman await the outcome of the negotiations—I am sure that he will welcome any resolution that is arrived at round the table.

Electoral Fraud

6. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What steps are being taken in Northern Ireland to combat electoral fraud. [36894]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): On 31 July 1997, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State established a review of electoral procedures in Northern Ireland. That review is due to report this summer, and will take into account the Northern Ireland forum and Northern Ireland Select Committee recommendations. Northern Ireland officials and the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland are also participating in the Home Secretary's working party on electoral procedures.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. As there may be a referendum in Northern Ireland as well

as European elections, will he estimate when the changes—specifically those mentioned in the Northern Ireland Select Committee report on electoral malpractice—will be implemented?

Mr. Ingram: That raises an important issue, not only because of the referendum, but because of future elections, as my hon. Friend said. The issues are fairly complex, which is why the review is taking place. It would be wrong for me to give a precise timetable, other than to say that we are urgently considering such matters as the way in which the electoral returning officer would process applications for absent voters. That is one of the Select Committee's concerns that we are addressing immediately.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): The Minister will be aware how important these matters will be in future, perhaps in the near future. Is he aware that 88 per cent. of those on the electoral list are registered with the car registry for driving licences in Coleraine? If that is taken into account, it could ease the time scale for voting. Will the Minister take that into account, in considering identification, for instance?

Mr. Ingram: As I have said, we are considering, by way of review, the entire procedure. We are taking into account the recommendations from the Northern Ireland Forum and the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. Specific recommendations and assessments of ways in which this matter can best be handled will always be taken on board. I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's observation to my hon. Friend the Minister of State with responsibilities for political development, who has direct responsibility for dealing with this matter.

Security Situation

8. **Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): What her current assessment is of the security situation. [36896]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): The current security situation remains tense, and terrorist incidents such as last night's horrific murder of Mr. Trevor Deeney continue to cause anxiety and fear among the community. They are clearly being perpetrated by those who want to see the current talks process destroyed in order to prevent the people of Northern Ireland from enjoying the benefits that a lasting peace can bring. There must be no retaliation for this murder: to do so would lead only to another escalation of violence and loss of innocent lives.

The security forces remain on full alert to prevent further terrorist attacks and the Royal Ulster Constabulary continues to investigate those crimes that have taken place. Every effort will be made to bring those responsible to justice.

Mr. Spring: During this difficult time, will the Minister pay tribute to the work of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in maintaining order in the Province? In any further consideration of the future of the RUC, will the hon. Gentleman ensure that no consideration is undertaken that would involve damaging the morale of those brave and dedicated officers in the RUC who do such a fine job in the Province?

Mr. Ingram: I commented earlier on the fine and brave work that the men and women of the RUC do—as well as those in the Garda Siochana and other serving members of the security forces, north and south of the border. We could include also those who serve elsewhere in the interface with terrorists, in the Prison Service and other areas.

It is important that the dedication and commitment to duty shown over 25 years or more by the RUC is fully recognised. That is why I am closely engaged in discussions and points of contact with the Police Federation and the superintendents' association and, of course, with the Chief Constable and his senior officers.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [36919] **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 8 April.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): I have been asked to reply.

As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is today in Northern Ireland involved in the peace talks. My right hon. Friend has shown that he is committed and determined to reach an agreement. I am sure that the whole House would want to send its best wishes to my right hon. Friend, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and to all those who are involved in efforts to bring about a peaceful and long-term settlement.

The further killing last night reminds us of the many people who have died and the terrible price paid by the community and the difficulties faced by our security and emergency forces in Northern Ireland. That underlines the importance of the task in hand—to reach agreement. A peaceful settlement is what the House would wish, and that is what the country wants.

Ann Clwyd: May I ask my right hon. Friend to convey to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the sincere hope of everybody in the House that those involved in the peace negotiations will be able to reach a lasting agreement so that the people of Northern Ireland can live in peace and harmony with their neighbours, regardless of creed and regardless of nationality?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House has signified that it completely shares those views. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has held a series of meetings with the participants in the talks. He will be meeting the Taoiseach and other parties again later today. My right hon. Friend continues to believe that tomorrow's deadline for an agreement can be reached provided that there is good will and commitment, and sincere negotiations on all sides.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Will the right hon. Gentleman pass on to the Prime Minister in Belfast the support of the official Opposition as he seeks to bring to a successful conclusion 22 months of negotiation, in which hon. Members in all parts of the House have participated? Will he also pass on to the

Prime Minister our sincere hopes that it will be possible to reach a peaceful settlement that is acceptable to the political parties at the talks and to the greater number of people in Northern Ireland?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I welcome the right hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box. I am happy to pass on the support of the official Opposition. I am delighted to do so. The Prime Minister knows—today's Question Time has confirmed this—that all decent and right-thinking people want the process to reach a peaceful and successful conclusion.

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply. Will he confirm that it remains the Government's policy that any settlement will be in accordance with the principles of the triple lock, whereby, before the settlement is put to a referendum of the people, it should have the agreement of the two Governments and the backing of the majority of political parties in Northern Ireland?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady is absolutely correct. The principle of consent must, and will, underlie any agreement. The Prime Minister has made it clear that nothing will happen to the people of Northern Ireland without their agreement. There have to be suitable cross-border arrangements. There has to be basic equality and fairness for all. These are the principles. Of course words and detail matter, but in the end it is down to good will, good faith, patience and determination. There is nothing here that cannot be resolved if there is a desire to do so.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My right hon. Friend will know of the new tram link system in Croydon, which is due for completion in November 1999. We are all aware of the welcome news of the renaissance of the London tube and the emergence of new democracy through the Greater London Authority. Can the constituents of Croydon look forward to an integrated transport system for London that will link up the new tram ways in London to the new, reinvigorated tube system for the capital?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That will be the intention of the White Paper on an integrated transport system, which we hope to publish and bring before the House in early June.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Prime Minister and the Irish Taoiseach carry with them the hopes of all the people of the British Isles for success in their quest for peace in Belfast. Surely by now everyone must understand that, after 30 years of conflict, this is not only the best chance for peace that we have: it could also be the last chance that we have for yet another generation. In those circumstances, does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that, whatever the price of compromise, the price of failure is greater? Does he further agree that, now that 80 per cent. of the agreement has been put in place, it would be unforgivable—and unforgiven—for any party not to find the final compromises to achieve success?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House will agree very much with that statement. It is about agreement. I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman has considerable experience and knowledge of the situation in Northern Ireland and is listened to carefully on this matter. Therefore I am happy to confirm that what he said is exactly the position. As I said to the shadow Leader of the House, the principles are firmly in place. All the efforts of the participants must now be to reach an agreement on the basis of the principles that I have just outlined.

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): I welcome the progress that has been made on the creation of regional development agencies in England. After 18 years or more of centralised power, we have an opportunity to disperse power in this country. I particularly welcome the role taken by local authorities and the business community in developing RDAs in the east midlands. What progress would my right hon. Friend like to see in making RDAs truly accountable through an electoral process?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House will be aware from many debates that I have a clear view on regional development agencies. I want RDAs to be introduced—as they are being introduced by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning. I also want them to be accountable. I would like to see the proposed regional chambers in the regional government context. That is what democratic accountability is about. The House has to be convinced of that matter. We want to discuss with people in each of the regions their attitudes towards these matters. Economic instruments need to be democratically accountable. That is my view.

Q2. [36921] **Mr. John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings): Precisely what support are the Government giving to hard-pressed arable farmers in my constituency in south Lincolnshire, and across Britain?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As with education and health, and as the relevant Ministers have said at the Dispatch Box, we have been able to give considerably more resources to rural areas, as well as to education and health, than were given by the previous Administration—despite inheriting a mess in all those areas after 18 years of Tory government.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that drug-related crime in my constituency has more than doubled in the past two years, and that class A drug seizures have also more than doubled in that period? The estimated street value of heroin sold in Luton is now running at more than £5 million a year. Will he join me in welcoming the eight additional police officers being recruited to Luton to tackle this and other crime problems; and can he assure me that the Crime and Disorder Bill will enable tough action to be taken on drug-related crime?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am pleased to say that the legislation will help, but other forthcoming reports will also be relevant. I welcomed the fall in crime reported yesterday, but it remains of great concern that violent crime continues to increase.

As for drugs, our appointment of a drugs tsar was a step in the right direction; a report due to appear before the House in April or thereabouts will deal with these points.

Q3. [36922] **Mr. Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset): In the light of the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), and of the recent report by accountants Touche Deloitte to the effect that there was not much prospect of profit in milk production, and of the Agriculture Minister's illuminating comment in the House that he believed there was little chance of farming avoiding a long-term decline, can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether dairy farming has a place in his and the Prime Minister's vision of cool Britannia?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is clear from our actions that farming has an important part to play in Labour's programmes. Some of the difficulties in today's farming industry—beef, for example—can be traced directly to the inactivity of the Tory party. Some of the problems of dairy farming are due to the deregulation of milk and dairy farming. We inherited these problems as a result of the Tories' inactivity as regards farming.

Anthrax

Q4. [36923] **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What were the sources of information received by Her Majesty's Government on 5 March on the threats by Iraq to smuggle anthrax into the United Kingdom.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in a reply to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 24 March 1998 at column 179, it is not the Government's policy to disclose sources of specific information. Any report is carefully assessed in the context of the full picture of all available information.

Mr. Dalyell: Bluntly, the source was Mossad, was it not?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Bluntly, the House would not expect me to go into detail about our intelligence or its sources. That, as I am sure my hon. Friend will recognise, would damage our national interest and place our sources at risk. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that that is the policy pursued by all Governments.

Engagements

Q5. [36924] **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): Given the right hon. Gentleman's admission that a minimum wage will destroy jobs and the Trades Union Congress forecast of 200,000 job losses in manufacturing industry, how does he reconcile the rhetoric of welfare to work with the reality that the Government are set to deliver work to welfare on an horrific scale?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is amazing that the hon. Gentleman talks about small numbers of manufacturing jobs, important though they are, when the Conservative Government were responsible for the loss of 2 million jobs in the manufacturing sector, which we have to deal with.

Under the wages councils legislation, before the previous Administration abolished wages councils, I was one of those who received the minimum wage when working as a commis chef in hotels. So that Conservative Members do not misunderstand, I should explain that a commis chef is a trainee chef and has no political significance whatever, although I am not sure that that is what the hotel manager thought. We should remember that what we are doing about fair employment rights will be welcomed by millions of workers.

The advice that the hon. Gentleman has been given to ask that question is probably as inaccurate as that which he gave Jonathan Aitken when he was his adviser. He expressed himself in the exaggerated language that he used as chairman of the Federation of Conservative Students before it was disbanded by Norman Tebbit for being too right-wing.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): How can I follow that?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the channel tunnel could and should carry much more freight traffic? If so, will the Government consider every practical means of increasing such traffic through the tunnel?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, I certainly believe that. I see a great future for freight, especially through the channel tunnel to Europe. In the past six months, I have been actively involved in renegotiating the channel tunnel agreement—it is not very good; it was negotiated by the previous Administration. We shall make announcements about those matters shortly, in the White Paper and on the channel tunnel rail link, as I promised the House.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and the Deputy Prime Minister's answer on manufacturing, has the right hon. Gentleman read the rather alarming report published by the Engineering Employers Federation on manufacturing in the west midlands? Will he join me and his hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase), the parliamentary private secretary to the Foreign Secretary, in saying that interest rates must be reduced to preserve manufacturing? The only way to reduce interest rates is by ending the political situation whereby the Bank of England is a halfway house: it is neither independent, nor fully controlled by the Government, as interest rates and the inflation rate have been set for purely political ends.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The previous Administration's record on manufacturing leaves a lot to be desired.

As to interest rates and the independence of the Government, I recall when interest rates doubled in a night under a previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, as the Conservative Government desperately tried to stave off exit from the exchange rate mechanism. We are more concerned with the long-term running of our economy than with the short-term boom and bust that we got for 18 years under the Tory party. That argument was well tested in the election; the hon. Gentleman had a majority of 238, with a notional 10 per cent. swing to Labour. It may be a case of "hair today, gone tomorrow".

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): With the Greater London referendum fast approaching, will my right hon. Friend do his utmost to ensure a massive yes vote in London—yes for a mayor and yes for an authority? Does he agree that it was typical and historically appropriate that Tory hereditary peers voted against the Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill, and therefore snubbed the idea of democracy for Londoners?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I strongly support returning choice to Londoners so that they can decide on their own government. Under the last Administration, they had no choice. The last Administration abolished the local government—the Greater London council—with no consultation whatever.

My hon. Friend's point is entirely valid. It is a bit of a cheek for Tory backwoodsmen in the House of Lords to vote against giving the people of London a right to vote on the issue. I believe that, on 7 May, the people will vote for an elected mayor and an elected local government. That is the choice that we are giving them—a radical choice. I look forward to a resounding yes on 7 May, and another U-turn from the Tory party as it begins to support us.

Nuclear Deterrence

Q7. [36926] **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards nuclear deterrence.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is so familiar with Labour party documents owing to his past experience, let me refer him to page 38 of Labour's manifesto, which sets out our policy on the issue. We put that manifesto to the British people on 1 May. It gave us the largest parliamentary majority of the century—and, I assume, the fewest Tory Members elected to any Parliament in the same period.

Dr. Lewis: I realise that, in view of his own deplorable past support for the campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament, the Deputy Prime Minister finds it difficult to say that he approves of nuclear deterrence. I have no doubt that he will follow the precedent set by his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) by emulating the evasive and slippery techniques of his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and referring to my political activities in the Labour party in the 1970s.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister simply answer one question? If, now that the danger of Russian nuclear aggression has receded, the Government appreciate nuclear deterrence, do they admit that they were wrong to call for unilateral nuclear disarmament at the height of the threat from the Soviet Union at the time of the cold war, when the Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister all supported the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That was an interesting question, but it was not truthful and not worth answering.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): As my right hon. Friend will know, last year in Helsinki Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to begin further strategic arms reduction talks—the START 3 process, following the ratification of START 2—with the aim of cutting the number of nuclear weapons by 2007. If, as seems likely, the British Government say that this is a bilateral matter between America and Russia, can my right hon. Friend say when he expects Britain to make a start on nuclear disarmament negotiations?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, we are re-examining those very matters in our strategic defence review. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has answered questions, and a statement will be made to the House at the appropriate time. It will be made by my right hon. Friend, as I am sure the House would expect.

Engagements

Q8. [36927] **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Audit Commission report published last month confirms that my borough of Southwark—the second most deprived borough in the country, where Labour has run education since the war—is at the bottom of the secondary school attainment tables, although it spends far more than the most deprived borough in the country. Today's Treasury figures show that, in the past year and the coming year, the Government will have spent less of our national wealth on education than the Tories. Is it not clear that, at local level, Labour does not deliver value for money, and at national level it simply does not deliver the money?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am afraid that, yet again, that is not consistent with the truth. I see that the hon. Gentleman is holding up a copy of a national newspaper; I hope he will forgive me if I say that it does not necessarily contain the truth.

I note that, when commenting on the amount of resources given to education and health, Liberal Democrats constantly call for an extra £1.1 billion in the first two years. We have given more than £2 billion to health and almost £850 million to education. That is more than was ever promised by the Liberal Democrats, and it is certainly more than was envisaged in the previous Administration's expenditure programme. It is still too early to make a proper judgment on the balance of resources as between all expenditure. It is over the period of five years that the electorate will make that decision, and I have no doubt that it will return us with a resounding yes.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): In this 50th anniversary year of the national health service, which was established by a Labour Government against Tory opposition, will my right hon. Friend take every opportunity to remind the British public that another great British institution, the national minimum wage, will be introduced by a Labour Government and that it is still opposed, as we have heard today, by the Tories?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is worth repeating the history which shows that the Tories bitterly opposed the establishment of a national health service. In their last years in office they claimed that it was one of their ideas, although few of them use it. I shall leave that aside.

It was a truly national health service committed to a socialist principle—treatment based on need and not ability to pay. I have always thought that that was the greatest experiment ever conducted in this country. Millions of people have benefited from it and we can rightly claim it as our own. If there was one thing that a Labour Government did that fully justifies the Labour movement it was the establishment of the national health service—and now we have the establishment of a national minimum wage.

Q9. [36928] **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): With the formation of the Euro X committee by European Union countries that will form the first wave of EMU to co-ordinate economic policy in the EU, could the Deputy Prime Minister explain precisely the areas of economic policy making from which British Ministers will be excluded in this phase?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is clear, and I think that the Prime Minister has made it clear from time to time, as has the Chancellor, that there are no areas of economic decision making from which the Government will be excluded in the EU.

Q10. [36929] **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that the Government's commitment to education as our number one political priority is a commitment that we expect all local education authorities to adhere to and respect? By contrast to such a commitment, may I tell him that the new Conservative administration on Essex county council in this its first year is scandalously planning to spend £3.5 million below the Government's SSA for education? That means that the successful music schools in my constituency face cuts of 70 per cent. Does that not demonstrate that, where and when the Tory party gets its hands on political power, whether at national or local level, it always cuts education because the Tories simply do not believe that it is important?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We should put on record the fact that our local authority settlement was about £835 million for education. Every pound was funded in full by the Government, so there was no necessity to cut any services to provide extra for education. Spending caps were designed to allow local authorities to put all the money that was given to them into education. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment wrote to all local authorities making it clear that he expected them to do precisely that. Essex received £497 million, which is £27 million more than in 1997–98. That is an increase of almost 6 per cent.

Most authorities have followed the Government's lead, but authorities that do not will be held accountable by their electorates. It is quite clear that Essex gave education a low priority, despite what we hear from Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen, and it has chosen to deny the people what we intended them to have—more money for education. Our No. 1 priority is education, education, education.

Q11. [36930] **Mr. Oliver Heald** (North-East Hertfordshire): Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us the answer to this: will he act now to save the green belt in Hertfordshire, as requested by Hertfordshire county council last week?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course, I have to wait for the judgment or the statement by Hertfordshire. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh.] I do not think that the House would expect me to comment without having seen what the local authority has to say about the matter. We have made it absolutely clear—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but an announcement by a Tory Member is not necessarily the view of the Hertfordshire local authority. It would be proper for me to receive a proper communication. I assume that even the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) would not disagree with that.

When I receive it, I will give it the proper consideration that is involved in these matters, but I have to say that the Opposition have had a very elastic policy as to what the proportion of building should be on brown-field and green-field sites: it has varied, basically, from 50 per cent, to 60 per cent., to 66 per cent., to 73 per cent—and I think it has now fallen back to 66 per cent. I await the next announcement.

Q12. [36931] **Mr. Bill Michie** (Sheffield, Heeley): On the day that this House adjourns for the easter break, should we not remember the millions of workers in this country who do not have statutory holiday entitlement? Does my right hon. Friend therefore welcome, as I do, today's announcement by the Government to start consultation on the European workplace directive in order that many workers in this country will for the first time have the right to paid holidays?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is exactly what we will do and it is another manifesto election pledge that we will carry out. To be fair, good employers give their workers decent holidays, and better companies sometimes do better than that. These regulations will be an important step to turning bad employers into better ones and to giving working people the decent terms and conditions that we all deserve. All that some Tories want to do, apparently, is block us in government achieving those objectives. We await the debates and discussions that will take place in the House, but it is interesting to note that the Tories would fight an election on the rallying cry, "Vote Tory and we will take your holiday rights away."

Q13. [36932] **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree with last week's remarks by the Foreign Secretary that, although 20 years ago Britain was stuck in decline, today, she is dynamic, self-confident and outward-looking? To what does he attribute that remarkable transformation over the past two decades?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It shows the real effect of a new Labour Government.

National Blood Authority

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): I wish to make a statement on the National Blood Authority.

Last summer, I received representations from local Members of Parliament and local doctors against the transfer from Liverpool of bulk processing and testing of blood. That had been approved by the previous Government, and was planned to be completed by 19 September 1997.

Having looked into what was happening, I decided to appoint Professor John Cash, then president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and former director of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service, to conduct an independent review of the proposed transfer. Professor Cash's review was welcomed by the chairman of the National Blood Authority, Sir Colin Walker.

On 9 September, Professor Cash submitted to me an urgent interim report confirming that there had been a serious breakdown of trust between the National Blood Authority and many local people and clinicians in Liverpool. He also advised that the rationale of the original decision to move the service from Liverpool remained unproven, but that the rundown of the Liverpool centre had gone so far that, for reasons of patient safety, it should go ahead. He recommended that an independent user group should be set up to monitor the service, and that a new leader be appointed for the Liverpool blood centre. I accepted those interim recommendations, while bitterly regretting that the original transfer decision had gone so far that it was unsafe to stop it.

Professor Cash submitted a draft final report, which was passed to the National Blood Authority for comment. Points made by the NBA were considered by Professor Cash before he submitted his final report to me. Today I am publishing his final report, which presents a damning indictment of the NBA's treatment of the Liverpool blood centre and the clinicians it serves.

Professor Cash concluded: that, over the past three years, the blood transfusion service based in Liverpool had been very severely damaged; that the position at the centre remained far from satisfactory; that it would continue to under-perform unless further action was taken; and that there was a serious crisis and widespread loss of confidence in the National Blood Authority by Merseyside and north Wales clinicians, hospital blood bank medical and laboratory scientific officers and the general public.

In the light of what he discovered in Liverpool, with my agreement Professor Cash extended his review to consider certain aspects of the general performance of the National Blood Authority. He concluded that many of the concerns that had emerged in Merseyside and north Wales were also evident in Oxford and East Anglia. A number of issues of wider concern about the overall management of the blood service applied across the country. All the evidence pointed to a conclusion that the NBA was failing to maintain appropriate operational connections with many of its management teams.

Professor Cash also concluded that the chairman of the board had often, perhaps perforce, been too close to the day-to-day operational aspects of the national blood service, and on occasions appeared to have been misinformed or to have misunderstood briefing that he received. There appeared to be a disturbing isolation of NBA headquarters from operational realities. Instructions had been inappropriately researched and not subject to effective consultation.

Since 1995, the national blood service has been exposed to a central management structure and a command and control culture that seemed to have insufficient regard for the views of customers and staff, and the interface between patients and the service. Professor Cash also drew attention to shortcomings in the arrangements within the NHS Executive, the Department of Health and user groups for monitoring the performance of the blood service.

Having considered Professor Cash's report and other representations about the performance of the NBA, I called in Sir Colin Walker, the chairman of the National Blood Authority, to say that I was concerned about the overall performance of the authority, and that, as a general principle, I believed that those at the top of an organisation had to take responsibility for it. I explained that, in view of the extra difficulties that the blood service is likely to face, I was not confident, in the light of past performance, that it was in the interests of the NHS for him to remain as chairman of the NBA.

Discussions have subsequently taken place between my officials and solicitors acting on behalf of Sir Colin Walker. He has refused to resign, so today I have dismissed him. I have appointed in his place Mr. Mike Fogden, the chief executive of the Employment Service under the previous Government. Mr. Fogden's appointment was carried out with the agreement of Sir Len Peach, Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Professor Cash made a series of recommendations about the future of the blood service in Liverpool. While pointing out potential risks to patients, he does not rule out reversing all or some of the transfer of services to Manchester. He recommends that the performance be monitored closely, and the position reviewed after one year's operation.

Professor Cash strongly recommends that, in the meantime, an action plan should be developed by the blood service, the north-west region of the NHS and Liverpool university medical school to upgrade the services in the Liverpool centre by such possible measures as the establishment of a regional stem cell service and a regional tissue bank, arrangements for specialist registrar training in haematology and transfusion medicine, and reviewing the development of the zonal reagent unit.

Professor Cash said that the Liverpool centre should be upgraded physically; new management arrangements should be put in place; more effort should be put into attracting and retaining top-quality staff; better consultative services should be available for doctors in the area; and there should be a drive to recruit more donors. I accept all Professor Cash's recommendations.

I have already appointed a transition director, Professor Bellingham, who is working to ensure that confidence in the centre is rebuilt. I have also established an independent clinical user group. I said in September that I wanted to maintain and improve blood services for the people of Merseyside and north Wales, and that remains my goal.

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

The new chairman's first task will be to implement those recommendations and to consider urgently the broader changes that are clearly needed in the National Blood Authority.

During a major reorganisation of their work, the staff of the blood service have worked very hard and effectively to continue to deliver a secure service to the clinicians whom they supply with blood and blood products. They—and 2 million blood donors in England—have done us proud. Both donors and staff deserve a new and better lead from the top. Under this Government, they are going to get it.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in telephoning me earlier today to give me the outline of his statement, rather than delivering it within the usual time limits.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the most important aspect of his statement is a belief that the medical profession's and public's confidence in delivery of blood services should be restored? Will he take this opportunity to confirm that the original reforms were not driven merely by a desire to cut costs?

Is it not true that—with delivery of blood services increasing at about 4 per cent. per annum—proper delivery of services could have yielded savings, which were earmarked to go straight back into the national health service? Is it not a fact that the original reforms were underpinned by a belief that, if duplication and administration costs had been saved, an extra £10 million might have been available to plough back into delivering primary care services? The savings were never made.

Is it not implicit in the Secretary of State's statement that we are dealing not so much with a defect in the structure of the National Blood Authority, as currently constituted, as with a chronic defect in its management and leadership? The right hon. Gentleman himself mentioned operational connections and the management team. The defect must be in leadership and in the management team. If it was not such a defect, I have absolutely no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman would take action to deal with the real defect in service delivery—frankly, by going back to the drawing board, and starting all over again.

As I said, it is essential to restore the total confidence of the public and of the medical profession in the services provided by the NBA. Will the Secretary of State therefore reconsider two passages in his statement? First—referring to Professor Cash and his recommendations on the future of the blood service in Liverpool—the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "While pointing out potential risks to patients, he does not rule out reversing all or some of the transfer of services to Manchester. He recommends that the performance be monitored closely and the position reviewed after one year's operation."

Some paragraphs later, the Secretary of State went on:

> "I also want to reassure the people of Merseyside today that the safety and supply of their blood services is now and will continue to be maintained."

Those two statements seem to be contradictory. If the Secretary of State believes that there are substantial grounds—or any grounds—for thinking that services are not properly run, effectively managed or somehow unsafe, the entire matter will have to go straight back into the melting pot. If we are dealing with potentially unsafe practices, a year is far too long to wait for a review.

Implicit in the right hon. Gentleman's comments must be a belief that the basic structure is sound. If that is so, it must be entirely right for the practices of the new management—those of us who know Mike Fogden have great confidence in his ability to grip the situation—to be reviewed. If we are dealing with unsafe practices, they cannot possibly be left for a year.

I commend the right hon. Gentleman for his closing words on the reaction among user groups, blood donors and the Haemophilia Society. The fact that some user groups and donors felt pretty remote from the system, when their contribution to it is absolutely crucial, was one of the perceived defects of the previous management.

Bearing in mind the way in which the right hon. Gentleman presented his statement, I shall not comment on his condemnation of command and control cultures, tempting though that may be. On several occasions, he has been commendably frank in deploring the leaking of statements. It will not have escaped your notice, Madam Speaker, and I cannot believe that it has escaped the right hon. Gentleman's notice, that the words that he used in today's statement, which I welcome, bear an uncanny similarity to a report in today's *Evening Standard* to an extent that would stretch beyond credulity even the most naive person's belief in the theory of coincidence.

Mr. Dobson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the report. He is quite right in saying that, particularly on Merseyside, and generally, the confidence of clinicians who rely on the blood service for the blood supply to permit them to carry out the operations that they need to carry out, the confidence of patients on whom the clinicians carry out those operations, and the confidence of the donors on whom the blood service relies, must be our principal concern. I hope that the changes that I am in the process of making fulfil that; they are certainly intended to.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome of Mr. Mike Fogden's appointment. It is essential that all those connected with the National Blood Authority and the blood service get behind Mr. Fogden in bringing about the improvements that everyone wants.

I would not suggest for a minute that the blood service does not need reorganisation and certain structural changes to improve it. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the biggest problem has been the management and leadership behind those changes. My own view is that we must, with all such things, try to keep structural change to a minimum. However, there are clearly faults in the reporting process in the national blood service through to the National Blood Authority, the National Health Service Executive and the Department of Health, so some minor structural and reporting changes may need to be made if we are to bring about the changes we want.

On the question of safety of blood supplies on Merseyside, my reluctant agreement to the transfer of the service from Liverpool to Manchester was based on the advice of Professor Cash that it would be less safe for patients if the Liverpool centre continued both processing and testing. So far, monitoring suggests that arrangements are safe. I expect them to remain safe; that is the object of the exercise. We need to see whether, on balance, after

a year's operation, both the safety and the general effectiveness of the service on Merseyside would be substantially improved by the return of some or all of it from Manchester to Liverpool.

I say to the 2 million people who are blood donors, "We depend on you." Our service is virtually unique in the world, in that people freely give their blood for the benefit of others. It is up to those of us with any responsibility for the service to ensure that all their voluntary effort is put to best use, that none of it is wasted, and that the good will that they put into the system is not squandered by other people.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I thank the Secretary of State for his strong statement and decisive action. His decision vindicates the very hard work of campaigners who fought so hard to preserve Liverpool's centre of excellence. I am delighted to hear today's news. Does he agree that the situation left in the National Blood Authority means that one centre in Manchester is conducting testing and processing on behalf of 7 million people and more than 35 hospitals throughout the entire north-west and some of north Wales? Will he assure the House that the monitoring that he will carry out over the next 12 months will not only take account of the specific needs of Liverpool and Merseyside, but will deal with the over-centralisation of the National Blood Authority, a process set in train by the previous Government on the pretext of rationalisation?

Mr. Dobson: I confirm that the only blood centre in the north-west that undertakes both processing and testing is now in Manchester. I have always had my doubts about the sense of that arrangement.

I too pay tribute to various people, including my hon. Friend herself and some of her colleagues on Merseyside, for their campaigning.

I must also pay tribute to the clinicians on Merseyside, who, whenever I was advised that everything was all right, got in touch with me to tell me that it was not. The National Blood Authority would come up with some new statement on what it intended to do and would tell me that the clinicians on Merseyside were satisfied. The clinicians would then tell me that they were not satisfied, and that was repeated several times. That is why I had little confidence in the people at the top of the National Blood Authority, and it is one of the reasons that at least the chairman has to go.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for the prompt work by Professor Cash. We endorse the decision to replace the chairman.

Given that Labour made pre-election pledges to reverse the decision to close the Liverpool blood centre; given that representations were on the Secretary of State's desk in May last year; and given that Professor Cash took only three weeks to write his interim report, why was the appointment of the inquiry delayed until August, by which time it was too late to reverse the Liverpool decision? Had it been appointed in May, it would not have been too late.

What is the implication of the Secretary of State's decision on the centres in Cambridge, Oxford and Plymouth, which were also closed under the previous Government? Does he agree that it would be better if the blood services were run regionally and made democratically accountable within the normal national health service structures?

Does today's announcement mean that the necessary funding will be made available to enable the National Blood Authority to do its job properly, that the authority will be service-driven and not cost-driven, that blood services will be available throughout the country when and where they are needed, and that they will be of the quality needed?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): No matter what you say, you'll never satisfy him.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend is right to say that the Liberals appear never to be satisfied. "Eternal dissatisfaction" is their motto.

We won the election on 1 May; I took office on 3 May, and received representations about the situation in Liverpool towards the end of May. I very properly started checking whether those representations were correct. I got all sorts of advice, went back time and again, and eventually decided that some of the advice I was getting was not worth a light. That is why I then appointed Professor Cash.

My understanding is that the rundown of services in Liverpool had been going on for the best part of two years. Some people who work in Liverpool had transferred to Manchester, and some had moved there. By that time, the situation was irreversible. There was no question of any delay on our part.

The situation is as follows: we are now taking steps to improve the blood service and to re-establish public confidence in it. I have asked Mr. Mike Fogden to take a close look at what is happening, on Merseyside and nationally, and to tell me what, in his judgment and in the judgment of others, is the best thing to do. I will then consider his advice very carefully, and take decisive action on what he recommends.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will be warmly welcomed by the people of Merseyside, whose views have been completely ignored by the National Blood Authority? Does he agree that we should commend for the work they have done not only hon. Members but all those in Liverpool and Merseyside—including the *Liverpool Echo*—who have campaigned against the decision? Will he do all he can to ensure that the status quo that existed before last year will be restored? Given the transportation difficulties between Manchester and Liverpool, the very idea of transferring the blood service from Liverpool to Manchester was one of crass stupidity.

Mr. Dobson: As I said last September and have repeated today, I bitterly regret that the advice I received from Professor Cash was that to keep the Liverpool blood service in the state in which we inherited it would endanger the safety of patients on Merseyside. That was why the transfer had to go ahead. The situation is being monitored closely, and one of the things I shall be asking Mike Fogden to do is come to me after the situation has been monitored for 12 months and give me a considered view on what should be done.

[Mr. Dobson]

However, I shall not indulge in sleight of hand and try to deceive people on Merseyside. I am not saying today that I can guarantee that the service will come back from Manchester to Liverpool, because it may not. The issue will be looked at rationally and carefully, but the trouble is that the status quo is now different from when the previous Government took the original decision to move the service from Liverpool to Manchester.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Secretary of State rightly paid tribute to the many hundreds of thousands of blood donors in this country—incidentally, I wonder whether he is a blood donor. As we approach the holiday season, when there is a shortage of blood, will he give an assurance to blood donors that there is no question of any danger to donors, either in Liverpool or in any other part of the country?

Mr. Dobson: There should not be any danger to donors from donating blood to the blood service. The only reason I do not donate blood is that the blood service will not take my blood, because I have had jaundice in the past.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today—there will be dancing in the streets of Liverpool tonight. The matter has been one of great public concern and we have massive public meetings attended by thousands of people, who I know will warmly welcome this statement.

In view of the appalling findings of the Cash report, does my right hon. Friend believe that other senior managers at the National Blood Authority should also be considering their positions—especially Mr. John Adey, the chief executive? Will he reassure me and other Labour Members that Sir Colin Walker is not walking away from this with a financial settlement?

Mr. Dobson: Taking things in reverse order, he is getting no compensation whatever.

One of the things Mr. Mike Fogden will have to do in his job as the new chairman is look at the general responsibility of people other than his predecessor for the present state of organisation in the National Blood Authority. No doubt he will come to his own sensible and, I expect, tough-minded conclusions. However, I do not have the statutory authority either to appoint or to dismiss people who are employed by any part of the national health service.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State will be aware that I have constituents who work at the National Blood Authority site at Addenbrooke's hospital who will be directly affected by today's statement. Does he agree that it is absolutely right that the chairman should have the authority and the freedom to restructure his management team, given that distinct reservations have been expressed in Merseyside and elsewhere about the quality of administration and management in the NBA?

Following from what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, will the Secretary of State comment on Professor Cash's findings on the transfer of services from Cambridge, Oxford and Plymouth? Obviously, I am interested in Cambridge, but these are general matters.

Furthermore, does the Secretary of State recognise that these are testing times for the national blood service? The difficult issues on which he has made announcements in the past several weeks include the theoretical, but not proven, risk of new variant CJD in blood transfusions, and therefore the importance of ensuring that policies are followed rigorously throughout the service.

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman assure those who work in the NBA that their position will be recognised as well as the greater customer focus, which I am sure the staff will find valuable in the future?

Mr. Dobson: I hope that, within the limitations of the law, the new chairman will have a free hand when considering and carrying out whatever measures he thinks necessary to re-establish public, staff and donor confidence in the blood service. The transfers involving Cambridge and, separately, Oxford were a lot further down the road, and had been completed long before we came to power. It would not be sensible for me to contemplate reversing them. The transfer from Plymouth to Bristol will not go ahead.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. These have been testing and trying times for people working in the blood service, who have been doing their job and managing to deliver safe blood supplies and blood products to the clinicians who need them, to the benefit of the patients who need them, at a time when the service has not been well managed—indeed, has been insensitively managed.

The staff have been subjected to the process of reorganisation, and it is immensely to their credit that they have managed to maintain the standards they have in extremely trying and difficult times. It was partly because I was not confident of the capacity of the leadership of the NBA that I needed to make the change, in view of the problems that might arise and the difficulties and scientific rigour that will have to be applied because of the possibility of the transfer of new variant CJD.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): May I also welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and offer my support for the sacking of Colin Walker, which was the right decision?

My right hon. Friend will be aware that what happened in Liverpool directly affected areas such as mine. People in Widnes and Runcorn in north Cheshire, as well as in other parts of Cheshire, supported the Liverpool Members of Parliament and others in their campaign for the Liverpool transfusion centre.

Does my right hon. Friend share my amazement about the statement by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls)? The Conservatives had all the information that my right hon. Friend has, but the difference is that he has done something about it and they did not. Some of their statements are crass, given that information about what was happening in the Liverpool transfusion service and the service as a whole was fed back at the time to Ministers in the previous Government. I really am amazed. Does he share that amazement?

Mr. Dobson: Very little amazes me about the previous Government. Obviously, I do not have access to their

records, but I understand that my immediate predecessor shared many of my concerns. It seems a pity that he did not do something about it.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I certainly associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) about the approach of the Conservative party. However, I cannot share the view of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) that there will be dancing in the streets of Liverpool, given that the service is apparently not to be restored there.

As a former Oxford clinician, a current Oxford donor and, perhaps, a future Oxford patient, I must press the Secretary of State on whether there is any chance of a reversal of the move from Oxford. If the new chairman of the National Blood Authority decides that that would be in the best interests of donors, patients and clinicians, will he be allowed to recommend it, and will the Secretary of State fund it?

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the statement in paragraph 13 of the report, of which he will be aware, that Professor Cash feels that the NBA press release approved by the Department of Health on 14 August, which stated that there were improved services in Oxford and Cambridge, was misleading? We have had a series of misleading statements in the services in Oxford and in other areas. There is a case for restoration of bulk processing and testing at Oxford and at Cambridge.

Mr. Dobson: I simply cannot raise false hopes, in line with the general Liberal Democrat approach to the world. The transfers affecting Oxford and Cambridge took place some time ago. If the new chairman comes to me and says that he has considered matters carefully and thinks that those decisions should be reversed, we shall have to consider seriously the proposition that he might put to us; but it would be raising false hopes to suggest that that will be the first thing on his mind. To reverse every damn thing that the previous Government did that was stupid would take all the time and money in the world, and we do not have it.

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that the proposal to transfer the blood service from Plymouth to Bristol, 125 miles away, will not now go ahead. That will be warmly welcomed, not just in Plymouth but throughout Devon and Cornwall. I urge my right hon. Friend, in the further review and in re-establishing confidence in the service, to take particular account of rural areas and areas such as mine, where holiday visitors put significant additional pressure on the blood service.

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming the decision on Plymouth. I hope that the Plymouth blood service will continue to prosper, provide a high quality service and enable the prompt delivery of blood supplies and blood products to whomever needs them in the south-west peninsula. That is the object of the exercise.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will recall that I raised this issue several times in the House before the general election. What he has said today proves to us that what the staff told us at the time was correct, and what the chairman and chief management told us was not only incorrect but misleading. Will my right hon. Friend consider the situation at the third centre in the north-west, the Lancaster centre, which is of particular importance to the north of Lancashire and further up in the north-west? It was an excellent centre, but it was equally affected by the changes made at the same time in Liverpool.

Mr. Dobson: I endorse my hon. Friend's point. From time to time, the National Blood Authority sought publicity, saying what an excellent job it was doing, when the money would have been better spent recruiting more donors.

The closure of the Lancaster processing facility has been completed. I hope that all the monitoring arrangements are in place, and that we can ensure that people in north Lancashire are benefiting from a good-quality, safe blood service. That is the object of the exercise. I know that Mike Fogden will enter into his new task, not quite with an open mind, because his mind is full of a commitment to improve the service and re-establish public, donor and staff confidence in it, but with the object of ensuring that the best services are available throughout the country. No doubt he will come to me with whatever propositions he feels are necessary to deliver that in the future.

Miss Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and his decisive action. The Lancaster blood centre in my constituency was transferred to Manchester, despite sound arguments and a huge public campaign against it. Is there any possibility that that decision can be re-examined and reversed, because that would be welcomed by the people in my constituency and the neighbouring constituency of Lancaster and Wyre?

Mr. Dobson: I fully understand and sympathise with my hon. Friend's view. I am not in the habit of leading people on. If I were to suggest that there was a likelihood of bulk processing and testing being restored to Lancaster, I would be doing just that. It may be that, in the fulness of time, changes will be made—that may be one of the answers. However, it is not particularly likely at this time. I hope that, as a result of the change I have made and the changes that I confidently expect Mr. Fogden to make, people's confidence will be restored.

Some of these things are not easily reversible. I suspect—I do not know for sure—that some of the highly trained technical and scientific staff who worked in the Lancaster centre may have transferred their homes to Manchester and be working there, with their children going to schools in Manchester. We cannot just reverse things: it is not a simple thing to do. What is crucial is whether people in north Lancashire will be getting a top-quality service. If they are not, we will have to make some changes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May a Scot, who was involved with Professor John Cash in a previous incarnation, commend the Secretary of State for his good judgment in appointing him? I also commend my right hon. Friend for appointing Mike Fogden. As Dick Crossman's parliamentary private secretary, I can say that he is one of the few civil servants to have escaped unscathed and with flying colours in the Crossman diaries.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

I have two substantive questions. First, is there not a general problem of a shortage of laboratory scientific technicians and officers? Is that not a national problem? Secondly, the Secretary of State said:

"the chairman of the board had often, perhaps perforce"—

I am not sure what that means—

"been too close to the day-to-day operational aspects of the NBS and on occasions appeared to have been either misinformed or misunderstood the briefing he received."

Can my right hon. Friend expand on that? It is a mind-boggling statement. I hope that the Secretary of State is right, and the solicitors are wrong.

Mr. Dobson: That is Professor Cash's wording, not mine. He had interviews with all sorts of people involved, he looked at a great deal of the written material, and he came to that conclusion. As my hon. Friend has pointed out from his vast depth of knowledge, Professor Cash is a person of immense distinction. He did a brilliant job running the Scottish blood transfusion service, and has just ceased holding the eminent position of president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh—a title for which most people in this Chamber would be willing to give their right or left arm—

Mr. Nicholls: Including you?

Mr. Dobson: Oh, certainly. I would find that an immense distinction.

I am willing to accept Professor Cash's judgment in these matters. As for Mike Fogden, it is certainly true that anybody who comes totally unscathed out of the Crossman diaries is clearly a person of greater merit than I had thought before.

It has never been brought to my attention that there is a general shortage of scientific laboratory staff in the national health service. However, it is crucial that we continually and continuously recognise their immense contribution to a top-quality, science-based health service. Those people have been badgered about and messed around, and their lives have been changed because of management fashion. That is what makes people leave the service, and deters good people from joining it. That is why we have to make these changes.

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I join my colleagues in welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement. However, the steps taken in relation to the blood transfusion service in Liverpool now seem to have been wholly mistaken, on the basis of misinformation, incompetence and poor management. I believe that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, it was right that at least the chairman was dismissed. As he also said, it is right that others should consider their position.

These are not easy times for Merseyside, and they have not been for a long while. As we are trying to improve our image and fighting to retain jobs and services, we could do without negative decisions, especially when they are wholly unnecessary. I hope that my right hon. Friend will again join me in condemning the decision and its effect—albeit temporary, as I hope that all the services will be restored to Liverpool.

Mr. Dobson: When my hon. Friend has the opportunity to read Professor Cash's report, he will see that it mentions the need to consider the impact on the great city of Liverpool, and on Merseyside generally, of the transfer of any national body. The city has been run down, discarded and cast aside for far too long, and we must start reversing that process—I hope that what I have announced will be a minor contribution to that. As to people considering their position, I asked Sir Colin Walker to consider his—I think that he considered it safe, but he was wrong.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Act 1998

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1998

Criminal Procedure (Intermediate Diets) (Scotland) Act 1998

Tyne Tunnels Act 1998

British Museum (Lindisfarne Gospels)

4.16 pm

Mr. Fraser Kemp (Houghton and Washington, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the transfer of the Lindisfarne Gospels from the British Museum to a location in the North East Region of England.

I shall first give a brief history of the Lindisfarne gospels. They were written and illuminated at the end of the seventh century—some 1,300 years ago—by monks who had come from Ireland to establish Christianity in Britain. They were produced in commemoration of a famous saint, St. Cuthbert, in honour of God. They remain one of the greatest literary and religious masterpieces in the world.

For their first 700 years, the gospels remained happily and peaceably in the north-east of England. In the 1530s, Henry VIII's commissioners decided to take them from Durham, largely because of the value of the gold around them. I am glad that that aspect of Britain's turbulent past has gone. I doubt that the Crime and Disorder Bill, which the House will consider shortly, will deal retrospectively with the theft of the gospels from the north-east 500 years ago, much as I would like it to. We are prepared to forgive and forget, however—hence this Bill.

In the past 100 years, there have been many campaigns in the north-east for the return of the gospels. I pay tribute to the Lindisfarne gospels campaign and Richard Burg-Rust, who organised a rally in London on the day after St. Cuthbert's day this year—I had the pleasure of speaking to the rally at the British library—and a petition of 5,000 north-easterners that was presented to No. 10.

I also mention the campaign led by Councillor John McCormack and the North of England Assembly of Local Authorities, which has managed to secure agreement in principle for the temporary return of the Lindisfarne gospels to the north-east for the millennium, with a digital version to which people, scholars and students alike, will have access—they will be able to study these great works of Christian literature. Last but not least, I also pay tribute to the Bishop of Durham, who led a debate in another place last Thursday—he, too, has been a strong supporter. I commend the efforts of all those people.

I believe that the Government have made serious and strong attempts in the past 10 months to recognise the crucial role that the regions will play in the nation's future. They have rightly done so on economic grounds, but I do not think that it would be incompatible to do so on the grounds of culture and identity.

I believe that the Bill would ensure that the culture and identity of the northern region of England would flourish as a result of the return of the gospels, which are a potent symbol of the north-east. It is a north-east which is equally proud of its history and confident about its future. The return of the gospels would send a message from the House that the United Kingdom is a nation of different regions. One of its great strengths is its diversity. People would recognise that if the Bill were presented today.

I realise that some hon. Members will argue against the return of the gospels. I fundamentally disagree with that argument. I respect the view of those who advance the argument, but I disagree with it.

There are many examples of national collections. The Tate gallery and the Victoria and Albert museum both have sites in parts of Britain other than London, at which national treasures can be displayed. I do not believe that the relocation of national treasure in any way diminishes the significance of the object or objects. That happens only if we define the nation as existing only within the M25.

Before anyone shouts about the Elgin marbles—they are often referred to when I raise the case of the gospels—I would point out that, contrary to popular belief, the north-east is an integral part of the United Kingdom, not a foreign land. There are fundamental differences between the marbles and the gospels.

I believe also that where we locate and how we display national treasures are important considerations. It is important that our treasures can be seen properly and enjoyed by millions of people. Currently, the gospels are located in a room somewhere between King's Cross and St. Pancras stations. I do not think that that location does them the justice they deserve.

The Bill deliberately does not specify a location. However, it has been suggested to me that there are many locations in the north-east where they could be displayed in a much better setting. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will agree when I refer to the mystical magic of Lindisfarne and Holy Island, where I spend my holidays. It would be a tremendous setting for the gospels.

There is also the peninsula, as it were, of the River Wear, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg). It is a world heritage site. Within that peninsula is a dramatic and impressive castle, and a cathedral where the bones of St. Cuthbert lie. I think that few in the House would argue that a room in north London, an area not renowned for its panoramic views, could be in any way a better setting for the gospels than the two places I have described. There are many more suitable sites. A return of the gospels would give a tremendous boost to the identity of the north-east, and to its economy through tourism.

The Bill also provides for necessary safeguards. I am extremely conscious that the gospels are great treasures of the nation. I am sure that no Member of this place would want to see anything happen to them that potentially could damage them. Access for the experts, housing and upkeep must be properly provided. If those things cannot be done properly, I would not want to see the gospels leave their current position. However, I am confident that the north-east could provide the safeguards we require.

I referred to access by technology. If the gospels were to return to the north-east, there would still be access by means of the digital version that I mentioned. Scholars throughout the world could study them, as well as those who honour them.

I do not accept that London would somehow become a cultural desert if the gospels were to return to the ancient kingdom of Northumbria. The problem with London is that it has too many things to see. Visitors to our great capital will often comment that London is brimming with works of art, great treasures and many other attractions. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.24 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp) on introducing his Bill.

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

There is nothing personal in my opposing it. I have nothing against the north-east region of England, even though I represent a Sussex constituency. I have nothing against the Lindisfarne gospels as a student of archaeology. Indeed, they are such an important work that they should be seen in their best context. I also have nothing against the sterling work that the hon. Gentleman is doing in the "Free Deirdre" campaign. I certainly do not want my opposition to be seen as a slur on the work that he has carried out on that.

The problem is that what the hon. Gentleman is trying to do is just wrong. This is not fiction. It is real life. I speak as a long-standing member of the British Museum Society. The Bill will set a bad precedent, which would ultimately threaten the integrity of national museums across the world.

As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the real importance of the Lindisfarne gospels is not as some treasure or priceless artefact that is nice to look at, but as an important illuminated manuscript in the context of early Christian literature, and an important milestone in the spread of Christianity in the dark ages across the whole of Britain, not just the north-east of England, or Holy Island.

Not all the manuscript's origins are even in the north-east of England. As the hon. Gentleman said, many of the illuminations were crafted in Ireland. The Lindisfarne gospels are notable for their combination of Celtic decoration with classical and byzantine styles, so, although they may have been collated in Lindisfarne in the seventh century, other parts of the British Isles may have an equal claim to them.

The Lindisfarne gospels are undoubtedly special, but they should not be the only item claimed by the north-east of England. What about the treasures in the British museum? What else is important to the north-east? When will the north-east ask for the Vindolanda tablets to be returned to Northumberland? What about returning the Sutton Hoo treasures or the Mildenhall silver to the people of East Anglia? What about the return of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic to Dorset, or the return of Lindow man to Cheshire?

Before we know it, our national galleries, museums and libraries will become warehouses for empty showcases and a hotch-potch of unloved, second-tier artefacts that fail to titillate the tourists hankering after the in-your-face buzz so beloved of the creators of cool Britannia.

To use that awful word, this is all about "decontextualising". To decontextualise is to turn treasures of national and international importance into objects just to be gawped at. They are best seen in collections that recognise no arbitrary boundaries of time or place.

The Lindisfarne gospels are best seen in a national and international context. Indeed, if displayed in the likes of an internationally renowned institution such as the British library—not the British museum, as the hon. Gentleman suggested—they would provide the finest advertisement for the arts of the north-east of England, for all our nation and all other nations to see, seven days a week and free for all, for as long as the Government failed to admit that they had reneged on their promise to provide free admission to our national museums, with their woefully inadequate £2 million in the Budget.

It is ironic that the hon. Gentleman should attempt to denude the British library of one of its most successful exhibits, just when it is about to be displayed, on 21 April, in the new exhibition galleries on the St. Pancras site, which has had £511 million lavished on it. That is a funny way to laud the opening of this important new building. The British library attracts many people at the moment, and will, I hope, attract many hundreds of thousands more.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the access that people from the north-east—indeed, anywhere in the country—will have through the agreement between the British library and Northumberland county council, and the electronic viewing facilities. Let us take the example of the British museum.

I have campaigned long and hard for the Elgin marbles to stay where they are. Some 1.6 million paying people visit the Acropolis in Athens each year. More than 6 million people are freely admitted to the British museum each year, where they can see the Elgin marbles as a centrepiece and in a magnificent and classical context, whereas fewer than half a million people a year visit Durham cathedral, which was one of the locations that the hon. Gentleman suggested for the Lindisfarne gospels. The British museum generously lends out thousands of items around the world each year. Currently, there is a collection of Indian art in Bombay to celebrate the 50th anniversary of independence, and a collection of Hogarth prints is in New York. The British museum and the British library successfully raise many millions of pounds from the private sector.

The Lindisfarne gospels are not in the British museum—the Bill is a flawed Bill. They have been and will be housed in the British library. There would also need to be a change—the hon. Gentleman did not touch on this—to the British Library Act 1972 to enable the gospels to be relocated. More important than anything else, it is an act of philistinism to remove important works of art and antiquities from their wider context—the rich tapestry of our heritage and cultural development—just to put them on a pedestal.

As the hon. Gentleman himself said, the Lindisfarne gospels are a treasure of the nation. It would set a bad precedent and spell the beginning of the end for the integrity of national museums everywhere if the gospels were removed. This is another example of the insidious consequences of regionalism gone mad. Ironically, it was *The Guardian* which once stated, in the context of the Elgin marbles, that demanding their return happened regularly in Athens—once a year in normal circumstances, and twice a year in election years. I trust that this does not mark the beginning of similar claims from other hon. Members for all manner of items of local interest to be stripped from our national museums.

It is with the greatest of respect to the hon. Gentleman that I oppose this Bill, so that the Lindisfarne gospels can be retained in London. It is also with the greatest respect that I suggest that he concentrate on freeing Deirdre.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It would be helpful to know whether the speech that we have just heard was, in fact, the British

museum brief. Was it the official view of the British museum, or was it written by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton)?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that that is of any importance. The hon. Gentleman made his own speech, just as all hon. Members do.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Fraser Kemp, Mr. Stephen Hepburn, Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mr. Ronnie Campbell, Mr. Denis Murphy, and Mr. Jim Dobbin.

BRITISH MUSEUM (LINDISFARNE GOSPELS)

Mr. Kemp accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the transfer of the Lindisfarne Gospels from the British Museum to a location in the North East Region of England: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 172].

Orders of the Day

Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Before calling the Home Secretary, I should inform that House that, between 7 and 9 pm, Back-Bench speeches must be limited to 10 minutes.

4.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has a simple, practical ambition: to build a safer and more responsible society. My wish is that everyone should enjoy that most basic of human rights: the right to live life free from fear and free from crime.

I will spell out the provisions of the Bill in a moment, but first I want to speak of its roots. The Bill marks out the new approach to policy making by which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister transformed my party from one of opposition to one of government. The Bill represents a triumph of community politics over detached metropolitan elites.

In the early 1980s, my party lost its way, not least by failing to listen to those whom we claimed to represent, and by failing to learn from them. My right hon. Friend broke decisively with all that and ensured that our policy making would be inspired above all by our constituents. Among many other things, that led us to a serious examination of how to reverse the apparently inexorable rise in anti-social behaviour and teenage crime.

Some pioneering councils, working with the police, contributed to that new thinking. In Coventry, the city council developed new ways of tackling alcohol-related crime and neighbourhood disorder. In Wigan, the local authority and the police introduced a model partnership scheme to prevent crime and to reduce the fear of crime. In Northumbria, a community safety strategy has made huge strides, by tackling drug-related crime and helping victims. It has also led to significant reductions in recorded crime. There are many other examples across the country.

As shadow home affairs spokesman, I built on those ideas. I was struck by the degree to which the problems and experiences of my constituents had changed since I was first elected in 1979. Then, the great bulk of my constituency case work concerned housing complaints and social security, but that changed from the early 1990s. More and more people came to me complaining of intolerable anti-social behaviour, of harassment and of intimidation. Much of the trouble was caused by children and young people who were out of control. The criminal justice system appeared to be incapable of enforcing decent standards of public behaviour on children and adults alike.

In my Blackburn constituency a few years ago, five members of a family were arrested on more than 50 occasions for offences ranging from attempted robbery to burglary, theft, criminal damage and public disorder. Convictions resulted, but, despite them and despite being evicted twice by their public landlord,

[Mr. Jack Straw]

the family, in the words of the local police, continued to terrorise local residents. I saw the results of the terror produced by that family.

On the Stoke Heath estate in Coventry, two brothers terrorised their neighbourhood. The city council commendably took action. After it made legal history by winning injunctions to exclude the two men from the estate, the quality of life for residents was restored. When I visited the estate, I saw that measured by the reduction in the number of voids—dwellings that had been left empty—on it. But the injunction was then quashed by a higher court, and the brothers were allowed to return. They caused mayhem yet again. The number of voids went up, as many people took the only action that they could take within the system—they moved from the area in which they had spent their lives.

In opposition, the views of colleagues in the House brought home to me the failures of the youth justice system. Three years ago, I wrote to every Labour Member of Parliament seeking their opinions on the youth justice system in their areas. I was stunned by the response. Every Member representing an English or a Welsh constituency who replied expressed dissatisfaction with that system of youth justice.

The Bill is therefore born out of the experience of our constituents, and out of their sense of frustration with the current criminal justice system. That frustration is shared by the police and by other dedicated and skilled professionals who are expected to solve the problems, but who have been hampered by a slow, inconsistent and ineffective system.

Our manifesto spelt out the need to modify and to modernise the criminal justice system to get it working effectively. The Bill is the first major step in that process. It begins our root-and-branch reform of the youth justice system, and it will establish new ways for agencies and communities to work together to support a safer, more responsible society. It will equip the criminal justice system overall, better to respond to disorder and to protect communities from sex offenders, from drug-misusing offenders and from racist thugs.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I warmly welcome the Bill, but is my right hon. Friend aware of the Cambridge United supporter who was allegedly observed chanting racist abuse and has been banned from attending football matches? Is he also aware that Cambridge United was unable to prosecute because he was chanting racial abuse alone, and not with a group of people? Apparently, that is not an offence. Is it possible to change the Bill to cope with such an offence, and does he plan to do so?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is quite right. There is a gap in the law, as is recognised throughout the House and in the other place. That gap must be plugged, and we aim to do so as quickly as possible. I cannot promise my hon. Friend that we can do it in the Bill, but if we can, we will.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Home Secretary referred to the promises that Labour made in opposition. As he is talking about dates, may I ask him about the pledge that the time between the arrest and the sentencing of young offenders would be halved? Can he give any date by which he hopes to meet that pledge? Will it be before 2001, or 2002?

Mr. Straw: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, our manifesto was for a Parliament, but if he can hold on I will come to that in a moment.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): As a lawyer with some experience of juvenile crime, I am very concerned about the abolition of the doli incapax rule. Given that it has stood us in good stead since the reign of Edward III, why has it suddenly become ripe for abolition?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman makes my case for me. The concept of doli incapax was developed when the major sanction against children who offended was the death penalty. In the days when children were hanged for stealing sheep, it was probably wise for the courts to establish clearly that offenders knew that they had committed a flagrant offence, rather than being guilty of mere naughtiness. Now, the sanctions have changed entirely. Lawyers acting for offenders between the ages of 10 and 13 use the presumption of doli incapax—incapacity to commit evil—to run rings around the court system, and to avoid proper sanctions for young offenders.

Something else has changed since the reign of Edward III. I think that children now understand the difference between right and wrong at an earlier age. I believe—and I think my view is shared widely in the House—that children aged 10, 11, 12 and 13 know that when they take someone else's property, or assault someone, they are committing an offence for which they ought to be punished.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will permit me, I will get on with my speech. I will take an intervention from him later.

This is a substantial Bill, with consistent themes running through it. It will end the culture of excuse that has infected so many offenders and their parents. It will shift the balance of power in communities from the anti-social and the criminal to the law-abiding majority. It will put the victim first, and it will ensure that offenders understand that even so-called petty crime has a victim. It will help to rebuild community life, and to tackle social exclusion.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Does the Home Secretary think that the Bill will cut crime? If so, has he any idea by how much?

Mr. Straw: I hope that this Government will do significantly better over the next 18 years than the last Government did between 1979 and 1997. The purpose of the Bill is indeed to reduce crime and disorder, and I note—I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to say this—that the police think it will greatly assist their fight against crime.

The acting chief constable of West Yorkshire, Mr. Allan Charlesworth, wrote to me saying:

"The Crime and Disorder Bill should give us more teeth to confront the crimes on the Ravenscliffe Estate."

That is an estate in Bradford which is afflicted by serious disorder. Mr. Charlesworth said:

"An increased focus on dealing with young people as citizens, victims and offenders will be extremely useful to us."

Mr. David Phillips, chief constable of Kent and chairman of the crime committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers, was reported in this morning's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* commenting on police efforts to combat violence. He said that those efforts were not always supported by the criminal justice system, and added that

"new measures in the Crime and Disorder Bill should help make an impact."

Part I of the Bill focuses on the prevention of crime and disorder. The police, local councils and other agencies must join in partnership to implement local strategies to reduce crime and disorder. There is also a long-overdue new remedy for communities that are ground down by the chronic bullying and harassment by a selfish minority to which I referred earlier. The anti-social behaviour order adapts traditional civil and criminal procedures to tackle that serious, persistent anti-social behaviour.

Mr. Hawkins: I particularly welcome what the Home Secretary said about changes to the doli incapax rule. Does he agree that one of the main concerns of magistrates in juvenile courts is their inability to deal with the most serious young offenders?

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I practised for some years at the Bar in the west midlands, and I am familiar with the Stoke Heath estate in Coventry about which he spoke earlier. Does he appreciate that, on such estates, it is the extent of serious crimes such as robbery with violence and blackmail, as well as the serious house burglaries and muggings of the elderly, that causes the greatest concern to magistrates in juvenile courts?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for this part of the measure and for his overall support. He is entirely right. He will have witnessed, as I witnessed when I sat in youth courts, persistent young offenders and, in some, although not all, cases, their lawyers running rings round the system and ensuring that the outcome reinforced the offending behaviour. The impression is built up that the youngster can get away with the crime. Rules such as doli incapax and the extraordinary rule in the Khan case, which insists that the first case involving a persistent offender should not be dealt with by the court until the last case in time is ready, create a moving target before the offender is dealt with. All those factors add up to a system that is replete with excuse, and that is what we are trying to get away from.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): As currently drafted, the Bill's anti-social behaviour provision, which I welcome, allows for an order to prohibit certain behaviour. Would my right hon. Friend consider accepting an amendment in Committee to allow orders to enforce an action to remove the cause of a nuisance? I refer my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 1003, which has been signed by 152 hon. Members, and which calls for action on vindictive behaviour by people who grow monster hedges, or allow them to grow.

Mr. Straw: There was a sting in the tail and it turned out to be about 18 ft high. The anti-social behaviour order will tackle a great deal, but it is about anti-social behaviour, not about large hedges. I know that they cause problems, but, to some extent, they should be dealt with by planning legislation and by proceedings in the civil courts in terms of the law on nuisance.

I shall ask the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), to look carefully in Committee at the first part of my hon. Friend's point. I recognise that it is a serious matter, but I do not want to hold out a promise that cannot be met.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Further to the question by the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), may I ask whether it is true that much of the disorder that the Bill addresses will not have featured in the statistics because, until now, there has been no point in reporting some of the juvenile crime, as the legal system in incapable of dealing with it? Everyone knows that, including the police. The measures will make a big difference to the quality of people's lives, but they will not necessarily have a big impact on the statistics.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is interesting that, in the previous period, although recorded crime went down, which is very welcome, disorder incidents logged by police at the point where calls were made to them—which is different from recording a specific offence—rose significantly. That is one of the reasons why the police greatly welcome the Bill: it deals with a huge area of bad behaviour that was not properly captured by the official crime statistics.

One of the most pernicious forms of crime is that motivated by racial hatred. New racially aggravated harassment, assault and public order offences will provide tougher penalties and greater protection for all our communities.

In the other place, we added a further new offence—that of racially aggravated criminal damage. That new offence sends a clear signal that we are determined to deal with criminals who not only damage property, but inspire fear and resentment with their hateful vandalism. The Bill will require courts to treat evidence of racial motivation or hostility as an aggravating factor in any other offence and to impose correspondingly higher penalties.

Nothing better illustrates the failures of our criminal justice system than the sight of young offenders committing crime after crime with, as we have all agreed, no effective intervention for months or even years. The Bill therefore includes measures to end unacceptable delays in the youth justice system, taking forward our pledge to halve the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked me what the time scale is. As with all our manifesto pledges, we will be judged on the time scale of a Parliament. When we first came into office, I first sought to discover how long it was taking to process a

[Mr. Straw]

persistent young offender. I could not find the answer because the previous Administration kept no figures about the time that it took.

Therefore, we first had to do a benchmarking exercise. At the beginning of the Parliament, it took 142 days to process a persistent young offender. We aim to get that down to 71 days. Enormous effort has already gone into that, and I am pleased that some areas have already made significant progress.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): Labour's pledge to halve the time was an effective election slogan. I think that the right hon. Gentleman now recognises that it is difficult to achieve and to tell exactly what time we are halving. Does he recognise, as I think he does, that we are dealing really with young offenders—they may be over or under 18—who commit 10, 20, 50, 100 or 150 offences in six months? How is he going, by that slightly artificial statistic creation, to show whether he is having an impact on that problem?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should give us greater credit for what we committed ourselves to in the manifesto than simply describing it as an effective slogan. To the extent that it was an effective slogan, it was effective because it dealt with a serious defect in the criminal justice system.

We decided to highlight that commitment both because it is very important to halve the time that it takes to deal with persistent offenders, and to engage the whole criminal justice system and the practitioners within it in the need to reduce delays. I do not underestimate the difficulties in meeting that commitment and I am well aware that it will be a poor career move for me if I fail to do so, but I am on the case.

The right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) raises the issue of spree offenders. Most areas have them. They may not have a record, so they do not come in the category of persistent offender for statistical purposes. We are determined that spree offenders should be fast tracked, but, because it is difficult to define them for statistical purposes, they will have to be identified locally. We are giving guidance to local organisations about how to do that.

The Bill will ensure earlier, more effective intervention to nip offending in the bud. It lays down that, for the first time, the principal aim of everyone working within the youth justice system will be to prevent offending by children and young people.

Child safety orders and powers for local authorities to establish local child curfews will protect children under 10 from being drawn into crime. The Bill reinforces the crucial role of parents. Parenting orders will help and support those who are genuinely trying to control their children's unacceptable behaviour. Sanctions will be available for the minority who stubbornly evade their parental responsibilities.

When children first offend, the response should be quick, firm and consistent. The Bill replaces cautioning for young people with a statutory final warning scheme. Warnings will normally be followed by intervention to tackle the causes of the youngster's offending. The Bill also makes young offenders properly responsible for their actions by the abolition of the legal fiction of doli incapax.

New reparation and action plan orders will bring young offenders face to face with the human consequences of their crimes and require them to make amends to their victims. Another defect of the current system, in addition to the delays, is that too often the young offender thinks that their crime has no victim, or that they are the victim and the person whom they robbed or assaulted has no feelings and that no regard should be paid to them. The Bill builds on the principles of restorative justice, benefiting victims as well as rehabilitating offenders.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): When dealing with part I of the Bill, the Home Secretary skipped over chapter II. Clause 23 is causing considerable concern to Shelter and others who think that depriving someone of their home after they have been imprisoned will not help with rehabilitation. They are concerned that the clause may be drawn too widely and will capture more crimes than was originally intended. Does the Home Secretary accept that it might have been more appropriate to introduce a separate Scottish Bill so that the specific Scottish concerns could have been dealt with separately?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office is on the Front Bench with me. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised that all aspects of the Bill that relate to Scotland have the full support of Ministers at the Scottish Office. The power that he has referred to is important. I want offenders to be rehabilitated, but first I want them to be stopped from committing crimes and disorder against ordinary members of the public. After the episodes in Coventry and in my constituency, the police and the local authorities could restore order and quality of life for the victims only by evicting the perpetrators and keeping them out of the area.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My right hon. Friend has not referred specifically to clause 17. As a magistrate and a founder member of the North-West Leicestershire safer communities forum, I welcome the measures on anti-social behaviour and partnership with local authorities. Welcome as the innovations are, does my right hon. Friend accept that they need to be buttressed to help deal with town centre violence and disorder by further investment in closed circuit television camera systems and making it easier to introduce byelaws to prevent drinking on the streets? Those are two valuable measures for north-west Leicestershire.

Mr. Straw: I accept that although the Bill is comprehensive, it is not exclusive in providing answers to the problems of crime and disorder in our communities. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the need for other crime prevention measures, which can include closed circuit television and bans on drinking alcohol on the street. Model clauses are available to local authorities.

The Bill sets a framework for agencies to deliver local youth justice services efficiently and effectively through youth offending teams. The new national Youth Justice Board will oversee the performance of the system. I should like the board to be established formally from 1 October if the Bill receives Royal Assent early enough. Subject to the Bill's being given a Second Reading today, the appointments process will begin shortly, in accordance with normal practice.

Drugs are at the root of much crime and disorder. The new drug treatment and testing order will help to break the vicious circle of drugs and crime. The order will permit regular mandatory drug testing of offenders as part of their community punishment.

All hon. Members realise that few crimes cause greater anxiety, anger and revulsion than sexual offences against children. We have acted swiftly to protect the public and to plug the legal gaps that were left in legislation by the previous Administration.

The new sex offender order will help to protect communities from known sex offenders who still pose a risk. A convicted paedophile could, for example, be barred from loitering outside a local primary school. If he broke the order, he would be liable to up to five years' imprisonment. An order, once in force, will be available to deal with any offenders, including those sentenced before implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

The Bill also provides for extended supervision of sex and violent offenders after their release from prison—for up to 10 years for sex offenders, and for five years for violent offenders.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I am very grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's courtesy in giving way. My constituency lies in one of the electronic tagging pilot areas. Today, I had a telephone conversation with a young mother who was very concerned at media reports that the released paedophile Sidney Cooke might live in one of the electronic tagging pilot areas, which would include her area. Will the right hon. Gentleman reassure the House that, wherever Sidney Cooke goes to live, local police will take every action in their power to ensure public safety and particularly the safety of local children?

Mr. Straw: I am happy to give the hon. Lady that reassurance. I should also like to pay tribute to the police and the probation service, who have expended enormous effort and shown great professionalism and skill in dealing with sex offenders.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth): The Bill currently time limits sentence extensions for some offences, at least in Scotland, to five years and 10 years. Has the Secretary of State considered allowing no time limit for extensions, at least in cases that are tried in the High Court in Scotland? I understand why cases tried in sheriff courts might be time limited, even if they are tried on indictment. However, perhaps we could allow extensions without limit of time in cases that are thought serious enough to be tried in the High Court.

Mr. Straw: As an English Member, I always hesitate to become involved in the intricacies of the Scottish legal system. However, I do not think that it is possible to extend supervision orders to life, as that would effectively make the orders life sentences—which are already available. Early in our Administration, I implemented section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, which provides automatic life sentences for second-time repeat sexual offenders who commit serious sexual offences. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office to deal with the point raised by the hon. Lady and to contact her about it.

I understand the widespread concern that the most serious and disturbed sex offenders should not be released from prison until it is safe to do so. However, as the House will appreciate, it is a highly complex matter. Clearly, there is a need for action to close the current gap in the law, which does not adequately provide for offenders who are dangerous, but are not classified as being mentally disordered. I promise the House that we are working hard on precisely how we should deal with plugging that gap. I shall make an announcement to the House on the matter as soon as I am able to do so.

Our manifesto promised greater clarity and consistency in sentencing. Under the Bill, the Court of Appeal will produce sentencing guidelines better to inform its sentencing decisions. Its actions on the matter will be supported by a sentencing advisory panel.

In the other place, an amendment moved by Lord Ackner was passed on Third Reading, to establish a standing advisory council on criminal justice and the penal system. I have considered the proposal very carefully, and, in the light of that consideration, we shall seek to delete that provision in Committee. As I have already made clear, the Bill provides for a new sentencing advisory panel and a national Youth Justice Board. We have, therefore, concluded that another unfocused body would cause unnecessary duplication and significant delay in dealing with many of the problems of the criminal justice system. Delays in the criminal justice system waste money and cause huge frustration.

The previous Government commissioned a review of delays, known as the Narey review. The Bill implements many of Narey's recommendations, including greater powers for magistrates and justices' clerks to manage cases, and powers for Crown Prosecution Service administrators who are not lawyers to present straightforward guilty pleas in court.

Mr. Beith: The Home Secretary has committed the most extraordinary twist of argument. He suggested that the existence of an advisory body would add to delays in the judicial process. How can the receipt by him of advice from such a body, the idea of which commanded widespread support in the other place, in any way contribute to delays between stages of the judicial process?

Mr. Straw: There are two separate points. Such a body would plainly not contribute to delays in the process of any one case, but there is no question but that it would cause considerable delay in the making of policy. That is one of the reasons why the old advisory council was abolished and more focused bodies were put in its place. The matter is for debate in Committee and, no doubt, on Report. The right hon. Gentleman will see in clause 1 the expectation that, before hon. Members and Ministers consider any issue requiring a policy change in criminal law, it will be referred to the standing advisory council. The old advisory council on the penal system took a very long time to consider issues and, typically, came to split recommendations, expressing two or three opinions in its reports.

It is one thing for Parliament to pass the Bill; it is another to ensure that it is implemented effectively. That is why we are working closely with practitioners to develop guidance on implementation, and why many of the provisions will be piloted.

In our manifesto, we promised a new approach to law and order: tough on crime and tough on its causes. The approach is overwhelmingly backed by the British

[Mr. Straw]

people. I am delighted that the Bill will deliver no fewer than 12 of the promises that we made, including the pledge to speed up justice for persistent young offenders.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I will not.

Throughout the rest of the Parliament, we will build on the foundations laid by the Bill. In particular, we will bring forward further measures to modernise the criminal justice system, help the victims of crime, protect communities from sex offenders and improve the performance and operation of youth courts. The Bill will make a real difference to the quality of life of people in this country. It will equip the criminal justice system better to serve and protect the public. It will help to restore the self-confidence of communities to demand and secure decent standards of public behaviour from everyone. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.7 pm

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North–West Cambridgeshire): The Home Secretary has set out aspirations with which all of us could agree. As Members of Parliament, we can all identify with his comments on bad behaviour and criminal behaviour. I suspect that all of us who have been Members of Parliament for any length of time can identify with the feeling that, as he said, in Blackburn, Peterborough and the rest of the country, crime has been getting worse and more vicious, and its incidence has been increasing. All of us could agree with his aspiration to address that.

I say in passing that the Home Secretary referred to several cases of good collaborative work. We have discussed that point, and I shall refer to it later. We on the Conservative Benches would still have hankered after a system of encouraging development of such voluntary activity rather than including some of the statutory measures in the Bill—not least for fear that many will become bureaucratically bogged down.

The purpose of the Bill, as the Home Secretary said, is in effect to improve the quality of life of our constituents. The desire is to deter crime and to punish crime. I welcome that recognition of the effectiveness of deterrence, a thread that ran through the Home Secretary's speech. He told us that the police welcomed the Bill, but he was not willing to give a commitment that it would cut crime. That reawakened echoes in my mind.

The Home Secretary will recall the very successful 1993 Conservative party conference, when his predecessor—

Mr. Straw *indicated dissent.*

Sir Brian Mawhinney: The Home Secretary is going to have to do better in that case.

At that conference, the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), set out a 27-point programme to enable the police and the courts to deal with criminals more effectively. The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor as shadow Labour Home Secretary was the current Prime Minister, who dismissed the programme as

"a series of gimmicks to get a headline",

even though the Police Federation called the proposals "first class". All 27 points were implemented, and yesterday we witnessed the result of that programme for the fifth year running.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman has broadly welcomed the Bill. He mentioned gimmicks, so am I to take it that he wholly departs from the briefing put out by the Conservative research department, a copy of which I have here, which describes the Bill as

"policy gimmicks dreamt up by Labour in opposition"?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I shall come to the substance of the Bill shortly. We support some of the Bill; some of it we think is good, but too weak, and some of it is typically new Labour and nannying—*[Interruption.]* I know that the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), thinks that that is a compliment, but I am not sure whether that notion is resonating quite so strongly in the streets of our nation as it did 10 months ago. In any event, we shall see.

During the debate on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill in 1994, the then shadow Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister, dismissed it as a Bill

"based on old Tory deceit".—*[Official Report,* 11 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 35.]

He said that it was "fundamentally flawed" and that it was not an effective measure to tackle crime. To coin a phrase, he was wrong, wrong, wrong.

Our measures produced five years of reductions in crime. That is something which can be appreciated in all quarters of the House. What I am seeking to underscore for the Home Secretary is the fact that we are not at all averse to the Bill, because we believe it will help to build on the foundations of that decrease in crime over the past five years.

Incidentally, yesterday we witnessed the most amazing volte-face by the Home Secretary and his colleagues. For years, they have been telling the House and the country that poverty and unemployment were the causes of crime. They have slandered millions of our fellow citizens by repeating that mantra time and again. Yesterday, they turned on their heel and told us that it was not poverty and unemployment that they believed caused crime but prosperity. That may have been the view that the right hon. Gentleman put out yesterday along with the figures, but, to judge from the looks on the faces of most Labour Members sitting behind him, they do not agree.

Mr. David Taylor: It is not clear what the shadow Home Secretary is saying, so perhaps he should spell it out. Is he saying that there is absolutely no link between poverty and bad housing, and all that sometimes goes with that, and a higher incidence of criminal offences?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: What I am saying is that for years the Labour party slandered millions of people by saying that poverty and unemployment caused crime, but that yesterday it changed its mind. I welcome a recognition that the old positions that the Government

erroneously held are up for review, but it would be slightly surprising if I did not draw such an amazing U-turn to the attention of the House as a prelude to consideration of the Bill.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Not at the moment.

I shall set out what we believe in. We believe in chief constables developing local schemes to crack down on petty crime. We believe in chief constables developing local schemes to improve public order. We believe in voluntary photographic identification, which would enable retailers to identify youngsters trying to buy alcohol or cigarettes or to rent classified videos when they were under age. We believe in parental control orders, so that courts could impose them on the parents who they believe could control their children, but are refusing to do so. We believe in giving the courts power to impose speedy sanctions on youngsters, including, wherever possible, an element of reparation to the victim.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Shortly; let me finish this part of my speech.

We believe that the probation service, not social services, should be responsible for enforcing community punishments for the under-16s. We believe in electronically monitored curfew orders nationwide for those aged 16 and over. We believe in honesty in sentencing and so favour abolishing automatic early release. We believe that judges should have the power to stop a defendant personally questioning the victim in rape cases and other cases when the victim is especially vulnerable. Finally, we believe that justice delayed is justice denied.

As a result, we support proposals that would enable all defendants to appear in court the next working day after being charged, that would enable at least 50 per cent. to be convicted the next day—compared with the present figure of under 5 per cent.—and that would cut the time taken to bring juveniles to court from 10 or more weeks to a matter of days. They are 10 things in which we believe. The Home Secretary will be able to read all 10 in our manifesto.

I say that because the Home Secretary said, perfectly fairly, that the proposals that underpin the Bill were drawn up by him and his colleagues while in opposition. I do not question that. Indeed, I pay tribute to him for the effective use of time in opposition; listening, consulting, reaching those conclusions and then reflecting them in the manifesto. I would ask the right hon. Gentleman in turn to accept that so much of what he has said was reflected in our manifesto. Our manifesto reflects a similar activity and focus as a result of our listening to our constituents.

It is because both Front-Bench teams came independently to the same conclusions—I am sure that the Home Secretary would want me to stress that it was independently—about the issues that needed to be dealt with and broadly how to deal with them that I make it clear that we shall not be opposing the Bill at 10 pm.

Dr. Lynne Jones: I want to take up the right hon. Gentleman's point about parental control orders, which the Conservatives advocate. He said that they may be appropriate for parents who do have control over their children, but what would he do about parents who do not currently have good control over or good relationships with their children? Does he acknowledge that the provisions in the Bill that allow for the support of such parents will do far more to deal with the problem of young offenders?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: The hon. Lady might have misheard me, but she can read what I said in *Hansard*. I said that we were in favour of parental control orders and the court applying them to parents who the court believed could control their children effectively, but who were not currently willing to do so. As for the details of parenting orders, about which I shall have more to say shortly, those are the sort of issues that we shall explore in Committee, if both the hon. Lady and I have the pleasure of serving on the Committee.

I have made it clear that we shall not oppose Second Reading, and I have set out the reasons why. We shall, of course, want to examine each clause closely, and we intend to do so both in Committee and on Report, because we believe that, although parts of the Bill are right and proper and will be a useful addition to the body of criminal law, other parts should be strengthened, and we should probe Ministers as to whether yet others are as effective as Ministers believe them to be.

Mr. Collins: My right hon. Friend is making an extremely powerful speech, with which I entirely agree. However, while he is on the subject of individual clauses, will he spend a few moments—the Home Secretary did not—on clause 53, which would reintroduce the right of someone who has been convicted of murder, rape or manslaughter to be given bail, even when appearing on the charge of a repeat offence of murder, rape or manslaughter? Does he agree that the existing law, introduced by the previous Government, was right in providing that someone like that should not, in any circumstances, be entitled to bail?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—I was relieved to hear his introductory comment. He makes a powerful point, and that is one of the issues on which, when we get to detailed consideration of the Bill, hon. Members on both sides of the House will have a debate that is more focused than those on some of the other clauses.

Our greatest criticism of the Bill is that it has been hugely oversold by the Government. Press release has succeeded press release and hype has succeeded hype; if the first hype of a particular measure was not thought to be good enough or effective enough, it was rehyped and rehyped again. It is almost as if the Government want the public to believe that the Bill is the ultimate solution in the reduction of crime. Time and again, with hype after hype, the Home Secretary launched the same initiatives multiply, although occasionally he let the Minister of State get his nose in. We were told, over and over again, the same news story. The fact that it was so often the same news story also tells us something about the professionalism—or perhaps the bias—of newspapers and electronic newsdesks, but the truth is that the Bill has been hugely oversold.

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

That might be thought to be a political point and, in a sense, it is; but the issue is more important than that, because such hyping raises expectations among people whose lives are under pressure because of the behaviour of their neighbours and the levels of crime in their neighbourhood. It is not, or it should not be, the purpose of the House to raise expectations to a level that is not sustainable by the legislation. The Home Secretary should realise that the British people are more sophisticated than that, and they are not simply going to buy soundbites—they want detailed proposals. In Committee, we shall try to examine exactly what can and what cannot be achieved by the legislation, so that the public have more sensible expectations as to its consequences.

Mr. Beith: I agree that this Government are never knowingly oversold, but did they not learn that from their predecessors? I recall the previous Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), making similarly extravagant claims about his plans to provide secure accommodation for young offenders, none of which was available by the time the Conservatives left office.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Before turning in that last point, the right hon. Gentleman should have remembered that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) has made a particular study of that subject. When we left office, we had provided 160 secure places, whereas, if my memory serves me correctly, the current Government have managed only six places in their first year in office.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): The right hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that his Government promised as long ago as 1991 to provide an additional 171 secure places and that, although they reduced that number to 170 so as to make the target more manageable, they did not achieve it.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: The Minister has made his point, but he knows that it does not stand examination, and that the Labour Government's record on the matter is in danger of becoming shameful. We shall have a chance to look in detail at some of those points in Committee.

I shall deal briefly with several of the issues raised in the Bill, because, as the Home Secretary pointed out, it draws together a variety of issues in a single piece of legislation. I start by saying that there is one aspect to the Bill which will disappoint many people, in that it is remarkably light in terms of addressing the fear of crime. The Home Secretary knows that, slightly perversely, the percentage of people in this country who are afraid of crime is among the highest in the developed world, even though our crime rates are far lower than in many other comparable countries.

The fear of crime is an important issue, which the Home Secretary addresses through orders aimed at anti-social behaviour—although I noticed that, in his opening remarks, he used the term "intimidation". Although that word does not occur in the Bill, he was right to use it and I compliment him on doing so, because it starts to get a grip on the issue of the fear of crime. It may be that, together, we can find a way to beef up the Bill so that it offers greater reassurance, especially to old people and people with young families, who suffer disproportionately from that fear.

We have some concerns about the consulting arrangements in respect of various orders. The consultation mechanisms are restricted to the local government area and the police area. Before Committee, will the Home Secretary consider carefully cases where people live on the border between counties and police forces? As we understand it, the Bill as drafted requires consultation in only one area, so there is a real need to amend the Bill to cover that eventuality.

Mr. Straw *indicated assent.*

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I am encouraged by the positive response from the Home Secretary.

We believe that the sex offender orders in the Bill are important, but that they ought to be strengthened, and we shall want to amend the Bill accordingly in Committee. I was recently at Styal prison, where I was again impressed by the number of women prisoners who had experienced sex abuse of one sort or another, either as children or later in life as wives or partners. I make no party political point, as it is common currency across the Chamber that we all have a strong dislike of sex offences. I hope that we can co-operatively find out whether the Bill could be strengthened as we examine it.

I am surprised by two things about the Bill. First, it is apparently not to be used by the Home Secretary as a vehicle to tackle a manifesto commitment made by both the Labour and the Conservative parties to prohibit defendants from personally interviewing rape victims in court. When I raised that with the Home Secretary during recent Home Office questions, he bit my head off, somewhat uncharacteristically. I raised the matter because it is of considerable importance both to him and to us, but more importantly to the country. I know that he has a committee considering such issues, which is dealing with vulnerable witnesses beyond just rape cases, and I would not want to disrupt the Government's planned legislative programme, but I am trying to impress on the right hon. Gentleman the fact that the issue is a cause of grave concern and a serious abuse. On reflection, I hope that he will be willing to disaggregate it from the work of the committee on the other issues and reconsider producing amendments in Committee or on Report to deal with it.

Mr. Straw: As the right hon. Gentleman may have spotted, I am losing my voice. I do not recall biting his head off—I thought that I was ever so gentle when I dealt with him, and he must look forward to an occasion on which I do bite his head off, I hope in full voice.

I was trying to point out in oral questions a week ago that that is a complex area of the law. The right hon. Gentleman will recognise, because his hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) pointed it out, that we have to take into account the rights of defendants, however unworthy they may be, as people have a right to a fair trial and to cross-examination being undertaken on their behalf. Balancing the interests of a victim, normally the principal witness for the prosecution, and the interests of the defendant, and securing a fair trial, is difficult and complex.

If I could have produced proposals in the Bill, I would have done so. I cannot, and it is better to ensure that what is brought before the House is in proper order than to produce legislation in haste and have to repent at leisure. It would not be at leisure, because bad legislation in that area would lead to the acquittal of guilty people.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I understand the Home Secretary's point and would not want him to deny the rights of the defendant. Indeed, we are not asking him to do so, and if he were tempted, we would not support him, so we recognise all those arguments. We also recognise that some time will elapse between now and Report, and while I hear what he says, I hope that he will not entirely close his mind.

Secondly, regarding what the Home Secretary said at the beginning of the debate about considering urgently producing legislation to deal with dangerous paedophiles, that is a matter of urgency, which raises significant issues. Again, were he to think that he could tackle it by an amendment on Report, we would be as co-operative as possible.

I turn the Home Secretary's attention to clause 6 and the crime and disorder strategies, as they may be a recipe for confusion. I know that it was not the Government's intention in drafting the Bill, or I believe that it was not, but our reading of it suggests that a district council should have a strategy, a county council should have a strategy and the police should have a strategy. While the clause goes on to talk about co-operation between persons and bodies in developing those strategies, it is not nearly clear enough in regard to each area needing a single strategy. We shall want to examine that in some detail in Committee.

Mr. Michael: To ensure that there is no confusion and that the interpretation of clause 6 is clear, it is intended that there should be one strategy, to be arrived at jointly by the local authority—or authorities, if it is a two-tier area—and the police acting together and involving the other agencies mentioned. That is the way in which the clause has been interpreted unanimously and enthusiastically by both the police and local authorities.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Given the nature of the Bill, that is what we think ought to happen. I am merely alerting the Minister to the fact that we are not sure that the drafting of the Bill gives effect to what is clearly a more sensible way to proceed.

While on clause 6, we also want to examine the dangers of extensive bureaucracies taking over. We shall want to hear the Government's plans on ensuring that the strategy does not become bureaucracy bound and enabling the primary point of the exercise to be achieved, rather than being sucked into the normal round of local government activity which, whoever is in power, tends to become bureaucratic. Also, when considering that issue, we shall want to be reassured about police primacy on law and order strategies and that the police will retain control both of budgets and of managing police manpower. Neither is made clear in the context of that co-operative strategy, and they need to be clear for the police.

Fiona Mactaggart: On that point—and returning to the right hon. Gentleman's earlier argument about there being no link between poverty and crime—is he aware that in Slough our local police commander has commended a scheme to give a night shelter to the drunks who live in the town centre as one of the best ways to tackle crime and disorder in our town? It is a clear example of the way in which a lack of resources—in this case, a lack of housing—has contributed to crime and disorder. The partnership that exists in the town, which is very practical, has already been able to tackle the problem. In fact, it was the growing gap between rich and poor under the Conservative Government that most provoked crime.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: The hon. Lady's real point is that a voluntary partnership was in place before the Bill.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): My right hon. Friend will recall that the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, introduced by the Conservative Administration, gave the local police committee power to draw up a policing plan. In Gloucestershire, that is beginning to work quite well and it would be a pity if this new power started to cut across that strategy. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the matter is examined carefully in Committee?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Yes, I will. My hon. Friend is right. Such plans were becoming increasingly effective. They had the advantage of having the police in the lead. There will obviously be a relationship between them and the new strategies, but we must not lose the best of what already exists.

Mr. Hawkins: Has my right hon. Friend noticed from Labour Members' interventions that there is something of a contrast between the Home Secretary's gracious acknowledgement in his opening remarks that the Labour party got these issues entirely wrong for years in the 1970s and the 1980s and the fact that some Labour Members are suggesting in interventions that, while the Home Secretary has acknowledged that the Conservative Administration were right all along and they were wrong, they have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: My hon. Friend tempts me hugely, but he has probably made his point. Having acknowledged that there is merit in the Bill, I shall resist the temptation to respond to my hon. Friend and instead will focus on some of the other issues on which I wish briefly to comment.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: No, I have been generous, and if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall make some progress.

With regard to the parenting orders, we shall want to examine how the Home Secretary thinks that penalising some parents will make more effective their control of their children. We are in favour of parenting orders, but in Committee we shall try to find out how the Government envisage the measure working and, in particular, how it will work effectively for parents who do not respond positively to such orders.

We are also concerned that the parenting orders may come too late in the process. There is just a suspicion from the Bill that parenting orders will not come into

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

effect until, to mix my metaphors, the horse has already bolted. I hope that we shall be able to consider whether there is any possibility of bringing in some form of slightly less draconian parenting orders earlier in the process, to assist young people.

All hon. Members deplore racist acts and crime that is racially motivated. As on the Labour Benches, so on the Conservative Benches. We take the subject seriously and we shall want to debate the issues constructively. Skin colour should not be an issue. We shall want to explore whether the Bill adds significant new powers to existing legislation or not, as was the conclusion of a fairly extensive debate in the other place among legal experts. I hope that the Home Secretary agrees that we do not need legislation that is a sop to those who are politically correct. We need effective legislation. If that adds to the ability of the courts over and above existing law to deal with racially motivated crime, we are in favour of it. But we shall want to explore some of those issues.

We shall not support or vote for anything that hints at endorsing racial behaviour. On the other hand, I am sure that the Home Secretary will agree that Parliament should not be frightened off from examining that part of the Bill closely, just because it deals with a politically and culturally sensitive subject.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The Conservative Government had 18 years to deal with the matter. I can remember attending many debates, and pressing the then Home Secretary about the need for tough action on racial harassment and attacks. What is the right hon. Gentleman's explanation and excuse for not introducing such laws?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I am almost sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. He knows as well as I do—perhaps he does not, and that is part of his trouble—of the steps taken by the previous Government during 18 years in office in a variety of areas, to address the problem. The hon. Gentleman probably does the House a disservice by trying to turn the Bill into a party political football.

We shall want to examine with care the concept of youth offending teams, in particular who is in the lead in those teams. That is not covered in the legislation, but it is crucial, because the leadership of those teams will have a major effect on how they discharge their responsibilities.

I hear what the Home Secretary says about the Youth Justice Board. We shall want to explore whether a national board is the right way forward or, given the nature of the Bill, which the Home Secretary says is community based, whether a national board is too blunt a weapon to deal with some of the issues that will emerge.

The Bill is full of orders—sex offender orders, drug treatment and testing orders, parental orders, training orders and supervision orders. The list goes on and on. We shall examine each in turn constructively, to ensure that those orders, when made, are effective.

We support clause 31, which abolishes the presumption that a child aged 10 or over is incapable of committing a criminal offence. I assume—perhaps the Minister will confirm this when he replies—that the abolition of the death penalty for treason and piracy will, under the usual conventions of the House, be decided on a free vote.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I do not want to challenge my right hon. Friend's view, or the Conservative party's view, on the presumption of criminal intent for people over the age of 10, but there are child organisations, including Barnardos and the Children's Society, which have views on the matter. Will my right hon. Friend try to ensure that their views are at least aired and shared in Committee, rather than just taken for granted because there is bipartisan agreement that there is no argument against?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance and tell him that I have already received a number of those views from the organisations to which he refers. It will be part of the purpose of the Bill's examination to ensure that all the views expressed to us are given the sort of consideration that he would wish.

With regard to sending 10 and 11-year-olds to prison, we shall listen to the Government with great interest, given all that they said on the subject in opposition. We shall also want to examine in detail the plans to allow prisoners out of prison before the courts say that they should be released.

This Bill will take up a great deal of parliamentary time. Up to 20 organisations have already been in touch with us, offering views and amendments for our consideration. As the Home Secretary said, it is a long and detailed Bill, which deals with multiple issues. I hope that he will accept that we have now started to establish a track record of not filibustering and of considering legislation constructively and sensibly. However, we will not be rushed in our consideration of some of these issues, which will affect the lives of our constituents for years to come.

The Bill is designed to achieve an improvement in the quality of life of the people of this country. It focuses on disorder as opposed to law and order. We think that there are aspects of it that are worthy of support, and we shall offer that support. We shall also look at its effectiveness after implementation, in the hope that it will continue the run of five years of reduced crime for which we take responsibility with pride.

5.51 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I have a great deal of sympathy with the right hon. Member for North–West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney). When I sat in his place, starting out as shadow Home Secretary, I had to wait another 15 years before my party came to office. Although that may have been partly due to my imperfections, the right hon. Gentleman may have to take into account the fact that there may be some serious trends in these matters and that he may find himself treading water for some time before returning—if he ever does—to the Government Benches.

I can tell my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that this is a Bill for which my constituents have been waiting. My constituency is one of the most crime- ridden areas in one of the most crime-ridden cities in the country. The overall crime figures for Manchester show huge categories of car crime, burglary and robbery.

My constituency is covered by C Division of the Greater Manchester police. In the last full year, the figures for C Division were the worst in Greater Manchester for burglary from dwellings; theft; theft of bicycles; theft from motor vehicles; and criminal damage. The total number of recorded offences in the police division that covers my constituency was far higher than in any other police division in Greater Manchester. The division covering the Longsight police area—C1 Division—was almost the worst in the city, with particularly bad figures for criminal damage.

The statistics, which have been referred to by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, cover enormous experience of personal misery. Many of them relate not only to recorded offences but to offences which are not recorded. A personal friend of mine who lives in the Abbey Hey area of my constituency had a very bad experience about a month ago. Louts broke into his car outside his house and set it alight. The car exploded and that set the house on fire, which blew up the gas mains so his family were blown out of their house. That was the terrible experience of one family as a result of one piece of mindless vandalism.

There is the case of a man living in a council house in the Fallowfield area of my constituency. The neighbouring house was in the charge of a 15-year-old whose mother had left and whose father had left long before that. That 15-year-old committed acts of vandalism. One day, he began uprooting the hedge between the two houses. My constituent remonstrated with him. The youth went into his home, came out with a baseball bat and hit my constituent across the face, breaking his cheekbone and nearly taking out his eye. Until I intervened, that was going to result in no more than a police caution.

An elderly lady—a pensioner—on the Anson estate in my constituency woke up in her bed to find a criminal ransacking her bedroom and peering under her pillow to find what he could steal from her. That is an all-too-common experience for many people who just want to live their lives in peace and without being harassed or interfered with.

At every advice bureau I hold in my constituency, people complain about all sorts of criminal offences being committed against them. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is accurate when he says that many of those cases do not seem too bad unless one experiences them. If one lives in a block of council flats off Abbey Hey lane with a group of youths congregating menacingly around the property, one is not living a tranquil life. If one lives near empty local authority houses or local authority houses apparently tenanted but unoccupied which are used for vandalism, blow torch attacks and all the other things that we all know about, one's life will be discontented. If one's visit to the neighbouring fish and chip shop involves fighting through a cordon of rowdy youths who look as if they are about to inflict harm—even if they do not do so—one is not living a tranquil life. Again and again, my constituents come to me with complaints of burglary, harassment, vandalism and loitering with menace.

Let me make it clear that I have no criticism of the police. They are doing their best in appallingly difficult circumstances. If, because of a shortage of men and women, there is only one local police officer whose beat takes him once round an area every day, it is well known to potential criminals that when he has gone by, that area is clear for the rest of the day.

Of course, not all police responses are perfect. There are cases where police reaction could be more sympathetic or caring, but that is rare.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Not just at the moment, if my hon. Friend will forgive me.

In the main, Greater Manchester police and the police operating in my constituency do their best in very difficult circumstances. The fact that those circumstances are extraordinarily difficult can be demonstrated by comparing the Greater Manchester police plan for the coming year with the facts. One of the things promised—I am grateful for it—is that 90 per cent. of 999 calls will be answered within 15 seconds and a further 6 per cent. within 30 seconds. The plan also says that the police hope to be able to respond to 92 per cent. of non-999 calls within 30 seconds. With the best will in the world, that is a hugely ambitious target.

The police station at Garrat way is staffed only part time, and has an answering machine. However, if people ring through to an answering machine, they will not feel that their concerns are being adequately attended to.

Let us consider the Greater Manchester police targets, as set out in the policing plan for 1998-99, which has been distributed to people in my area. Their target is to detect 13 per cent. of burglary in dwellings by primary means and 13.1 per cent. of burglary in dwellings overall—that is the target they hope to fulfil, which would mean that 87 per cent. of the burglaries would not be detected. Nevertheless, the target is ambitious; it would mean doubling last year's rate of 6.4 per cent.

The target for thefts from motor vehicles by primary means is 6 per cent.—that is what the police hope to achieve if they do really well—which acknowledges that 94 per cent. will not be detected. That is hugely ambitious, as it would mean almost trebling last year's detection rate of 2.5 per cent.

I repeat that I do not criticise the police. I am not accusing them, but clarifying the fact that the overwhelming majority of the crime that affects our constituents will not be solved. Moreover, I am talking only about recorded crime. Large numbers of such crimes are not reported, except for insurance purposes, and even then, one must take into account the fact that, in a constituency such as mine, many people cannot afford insurance—even if they can, they have to pay more than people who live in more tranquil areas do.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

I am one of the many hon. Members who live in their own constituencies. I have to pay a higher premium to insure my house and its contents in inner-city Manchester than I do in St. John's Wood, where my flat is in London. I have the same insurance agent for both—the Co-op.

[Mr. Kaufman]

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I can give hon. Members the name of my agent, if they need one—Mr. Kilgour is a very nice man and has been dealing with me for years.

The clear-up rate for theft is 5.4 per cent. As I said, that does not include unreported crimes. Within that figure, the proportion of juvenile crime is fearsome. C Division, which covers my constituency, has figures that show among the worst incidence of crime committed by children aged 14 and under. I am sure that all hon. Members who have been in the House for some time will know that juvenile crime has risen relentlessly. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right to say that, in the past decade, the amount of crime work has almost overtaken the amount of any other kind of case work with which Members of Parliament have to deal. Within that, juvenile crime—crime committed by young people, including small children—has grown frighteningly.

The victims of crime include individuals in the street, in their homes, in their workplaces and in their cars. In my constituency, which I cannot believe is unique in this, schools are being broken into—computers, in particular, are being stolen. All that attacks the very basis of local cohesion in any community.

Mr. Bermingham *rose—*

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to my hon. Friend if he wants to intervene, but perhaps I have satisfied his every requirement.

Mr. Bermingham: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that the greatest deterrent against any form of crime is detection? If the police lack resources in Greater Manchester, Merseyside or anywhere else, the detection rate falls. We are paying the price for 10 years of under-investment.

Mr. Kaufman: I agree that detection is part of the way in which to deal with crime, but the other part, which is very much the subject of the Bill, is prevention. I certainly agree with what my hon. Friend says about resources. Nevertheless, things can be done even within existing resources. A scheme in my constituency deals with the serious problem whereby people, especially pensioners, become victims of multiple crimes—when they have been burgled once, they are burgled again and again. The police in my area have set up schemes to deal with that, and are making some headway.

As I said, this situation cannot be allowed to continue. Everything that is spent on detecting crime—essential as that is—is a waste of resources that otherwise could be spent more constructively. Crime is bad for the community. Life in areas of my constituency—even though it is in the inner city, it consists, like many constituencies, of interconnected villages—is seriously affected by the incidence and nature of crime.

Crime is bad for the offenders. Reprehensible and wicked as the acts of offenders are, their lives are being wasted. Young people—boys in particular; crime tends to involve boys rather than girls—who set out on a life of crime and drug taking fail to realise their potential of a fulfilling and constructive life, which is also bad for their families.

I strongly welcome the Bill. I welcome its emphasis and its practical proposals for dealing not only with existing offences but with anti-social behaviour and harassment that causes distress and alarm. I also welcome the parenting orders—it is essential that parents be made responsible. We talk about requirements on society and about what schoolteachers and social workers should do, but, in the end, parents have the responsibility. At meetings in my constituency on law and order, I hear again and again people's belief that parents must be made to be and seen to be responsible.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Does my right hon. Friend accept that existing powers under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, by which parents can be made to pay fines and be bound over to keep their children under control, do not work? It may be appropriate to issue such orders, but sometimes parents have no control over their children and need a continuing programme of support.

Mr. Kaufman: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, but I am sure that she would accept that there are different kinds of relationships between parents and children. Some parents care a great deal; they do everything that they can to prevent their children from erring and help them when they do. Some parents seem incapable of doing that, even though they want to. Some parents, sadly, seem to have no concern whatever. I strongly support the provisions in the Bill that will assist in dealing with the last two categories.

I strongly support also—

Mr. Green: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Yes. I said earlier that I would give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Green: Before the right hon. Gentleman moves too far away from the performance of the police, and given his privileged position as a distinguished elder statesman in whom all ambition is spent, will he acknowledge one of the most common delusions of our constituents, which is that one of the ways to increase police effectiveness is to put back the bobby on the beat undertaking traditional patrolling? There is evidence, which unfortunately the general public do not accept, that such patrolling is one of the least effective ways of tackling crime, catching criminals and improving the figures to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred. It behoves those in the House who have studied these matters deeply and have a deep knowledge of them, as the right hon. Gentleman has, to try to combat this widespread public delusion.

Mr. Kaufman: It is obvious—I do not think that anyone, including the hon. Gentleman, would deny this—that the sight of a uniformed police officer is extremely reassuring. However, it has to be accepted that we shall never be able to afford to employ sufficient police officers for them to be seen regularly in all neighbourhoods. It is not possible to do that. As I have said, there is a local, highly regarded bobby in one part of my constituency who can only complete his beat once a day.

We would very much like to see more bobbies on the beat, but it is impractical to suggest that there would be sufficient quantities of human beings in evidence to deter

crime. Few crimes are committed in the view of a police officer. Many crimes are committed by those who know that once they have seen the police officer on his or her beat that day they will not see the officer again that day.

I particularly welcome child safety orders for No. 10s—I mean under-10s, although my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already said publicly what child safety orders mean for his children: he has warned them that, if they do not behave, he will call in my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. That has already been accomplished, perhaps, with a Freudian slip on my part. I am pleased that there is provision for care, protection and support to prevent repetition of offences. That is extremely important.

I strongly support the curfew provisions because kids under 10 should not be hanging around in the streets after 9 o'clock at night. However, I ask my right hon. Friend to examine the possibility of providing powers for curfews before 9 pm, provided that the circumstances make that appropriate.

Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I welcome the change in the law of criminal responsibility. I welcome also the replacement of cautions, which do not do much good, by reprimands and warnings. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister of State, when he replies, would explain what happens as a consequence of reprimands. The Bill is clear about what happens as a consequence of warnings, but I am not as clear as I should be about what clause 53 does about reprimands.

The Bill includes provisions for reparation orders. It is excellent that there should be emphasis on reparation for victims and on benefits for offenders. There is an emphasis on training during detention and, of course, on dealing with racial aggravation.

When the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz)—I do not blame the right hon. Gentleman for this—he was far from accurate. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I do not wish to make this a party political point, but it is a fact that, 12 years ago, when I was shadow Home Secretary, I introduced in Standing Committee G on 10 April 1986 a new clause that would have created the offence of racial harassment. The then Conservative Government defeated it. On 12 April 1994, I spoke from the Opposition Benches on the then Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. I spoke in favour of the creation of an offence of racial harassment. That proposal was defeated by the then Conservative Government.

Leaving aside recriminations about what happened all those years ago, the fact is that action could have been taken a long time ago on racial harassment. Unfortunately, the proposal was rejected by the then Government.

Clause 45 relates to the use of television links at preliminary hearings. I welcome the provision, but I ask my right hon. Friend to consider in Committee the inclusion of internet links. By the time the Bill has been enacted and implemented for a few years, visual internet connections may be the rule rather than the exception. It would be as well to provide for that in the Bill.

The Bill is ambitious. It needs commitment by all the forces of law and order and by all the support services. It also needs resources, both human and financial, and those will not be easy to obtain in a well-controlled budgetary climate, which I support. Nevertheless, we shall need those resources. Great hope reposes in the Bill. It must not fail, and I believe that it will succeed.

6.16 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in his thoughtful mode. We have heard him speak movingly about the rundown constituency in the poor part of Greater Manchester that he has represented for so many years. It will be one of the great challenges for the Conservative party in the intervening four or five years that are left to us to refresh our ideas so that we can help to change the ambience of that sort of inner-city area, as we have begun to change it in other parts of the country. That is pretty fundamental to tackling the sort of problems that the right hon. Gentleman has rightly identified.

There is much common ground on the subject of crime and disorder. I am glad that the Bill—I think that Conservatives are entitled to say this—builds on many of the ideas that we were developing, or beginning to develop, during the previous Parliament, and even further back. I can recall, if it is not too tedious, that I introduced the first curfew order in the Criminal Justice Bill of 1981, which became the Criminal Justice Act 1982. It found a position in that measure as the night restriction order. It was initially greeted with hesitation, but others have rightly built upon it, and I am glad that it is built upon further in the Bill.

We are right to say, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) has said, that the Conservative Government can congratulate themselves on turning the tide in recorded crime. That owes a good deal to the courage of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). Although my right hon. and learned Friend has taken a great deal of flak at many stages, he changed a consistently rising level of recorded crime to levels that have been falling pretty steadily and significantly for five years. That is particularly because he has sent out a powerful signal that crime is not to be allowed to pay. Keeping persistent burglars out of circulation for a significant period cuts the amount of burglary that they can commit. To that extent, I support the view, which is sometimes regarded as controversial, that prison works.

In other areas, I believe in short sentences, and in seeking to protect the public in ways that we put into effect in the previous Parliament.

I wish to put the Bill into the wider criminal justice context, because, after 18 years—others will know from much longer experience—we know that no criminal justice Bill suddenly solves a particular problem, and that is certainly true of a Christmas tree-type Bill such as this, with a great many useful measures. It will not solve overnight the problems that we have to deal with.

It is a common objective of the Labour and Conservative parties to seek to reduce delay in the criminal justice system. The Home Secretary rightly acknowledged that many of the ideas in the Bill stem from the Narey report, instituted by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe and published in February 1997.

I strongly support the abolition of doli incapax, but we must look carefully at how we do it, and at the detail. We should probably get rid of it altogether, and not seek to

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

include alternative presumptions or any undue complexity. It never featured until recently, and it has begun to be used as a defence trick, sometimes at the instance of the young offender, and sometimes at the instance of lawyers. It simply holds up cases—sometimes seriously—while a teacher or someone who knows the youth in question is brought to court to give evidence that they plainly understand. It is outdated, and should go.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned the Narey report. Will he comment, as a distinguished former Attorney-General, on the Bar Council, which is worried about a recommendation, flowing from the Narey report on clause 50 of the Bill, that non-legal staff will be able to institute proceedings and prosecute such matters as contested bail applications in court? Is that not a dangerous precedent? As Lord Mishcon said, should not a professional, independent mind be exercised on these important issues in the Crown Prosecution Service?

Sir Nicholas Lyell: My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I shall deal with it in a moment.

I shall focus my attention on delay. I asked the Attorney-General where we were to find the Government's proposals for speeding up criminal justice and thereby fulfilling their election promise to halve the time it takes for persistent young offenders to be brought before the court. He told me that I should burn the midnight oil and read the Bill. I have.

As I mentioned briefly when the Home Secretary kindly took my intervention, the Government should be careful not to be deluded by their own hype. They propose a pretty restrictive technical definition of a persistent offender—someone who has appeared three times before the court. Then, having noted that it took 142 days for someone to appear before the court, they propose to take some administrative step to ensure that it takes only 71 days. That is unlikely to solve the problem. I say this in anticipation of future, rather more party political, occasions. If the Government trot that forward as success, without tackling the real problem, it will be an empty gesture.

The real problem is that a substantial proportion of crime is committed by quite a small percentage of offenders, who commit offences time and again—five, 10, 15, 50, 100 or more offences within, say, six months. These are not just spree offenders, as the Home Secretary put it, although they exist. He is right to have learnt that from the inner London Crown Prosecution Service and other CPS areas. These are persistent offenders, people who make their living from crime, and who burgle time and again.

The three agencies—the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Court Service—should work closely together. It must be their joint and several duty to ensure that a multiple offender identified as having committed a significant number of crimes is brought before the court promptly, without delay. I entirely agree with the Home Secretary's intention to abolish the rule in the case of R. *v.* Khan. The judgment was given in earlier times, without a full understanding of the problem of multiple offenders. There needs to be a reasonable, representative sample of the offences—three or four will be quite sufficient—and the offenders should then be brought before the court.

That is easier said than done, because it is not easy for one police area, Crown Prosecution Service area or Court Service area to know what is happening in another. The Government must bend their mind—as we sought to do, but we did not crack the problem, which is on-going—to find a way in which cases can be brought together. We must ensure that legislation allows them to be brought to any convenient court, so that they can be promptly tried. That will require an updating of the three agencies' computer facilities. I hope that it will be possible to build on the e-mail facilities which have been effectively piloted in parts of the CPS.

I now deal with the best use of resources. I shall make a few comments on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I am talking about the use of unqualified staff in court cases. The danger is that those on the administrative side always want to get things done quickly and cheaply, and they always ask for too much. They always want unqualified people to be able to do almost everything, on the basis that any idiot can present a case. On the other side, the professions and trade unions do not want anybody who is unqualified or not an established member of a body to be able to do anything that they cannot do at present, for fear that the floodgates will be opened and the service diminished.

The Bar has come forward with sensible objections to the gates being opened too wide. I shall not seek to prescribe on Second Reading exactly how we should do it—that is a matter for the Government and for careful consideration in Committee. In my view, if one can make small advances, one can get a significant benefit.

It must be recognised—this is the point that the Bar makes most effectively—that, when one is prosecuting, one is dealing with people's rights and liberties, and if nobody in court is properly qualified to evaluate the case, or if the case has been evaluated in the CPS by somebody who is not properly legally trained and experienced, injustice may follow.

The CPS was set up as a result of the Philips royal commission in the late 1970s, which was instituted by the previous Labour Government and picked up by the incoming Conservative Government in 1979, so that there was a proper, professional service to review prosecutions. That must not be unduly diluted.

Mr. Hawkins: Even though non-lawyers might think that only uncontested hearings are at stake, so it does not matter, would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the duty of a prosecutor is quite different from that of a defending advocate? A prosecutor has a duty to draw to the court's attention, even in an uncontested hearing, anything that may be important. That is why a qualified person needs to look into the matter to determine whether the court should be informed of anything bearing on the liberty of the subject.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: That is a good point—I agree with my hon. Friend. The accused may be rather bemused. He may say that, although he took goods from a shop he did not mean to put them in his bag instead of the basket—but he did put them in his bag so he is guilty.

The prosecutor may recognise that the person is not automatically guilty, and that the issue should go to trial; it should not just be processed, resulting in an unjustified criminal record for the person in question.

I believe it right to give justices' clerks greater powers—they are becoming ever better trained these days—to marshal and prepare cases, thereby allowing swifter action; but it is important that the dominant power remain with the magistrate, whether stipendiary or on the lay bench. We need the sound, local, common-sense skills of magistrates in the criminal justice system; those skills are immensely valuable. Therefore, although the idea represents an advance, it must be treated with care, so as not to dilute the strengths in the system that I have mentioned.

I come next to sentencing powers and—that awful word—disposals. The Bill contains an enormous variety of new orders: they concern anti-social neighbours, sex offenders, drug offenders, curfews, parenting, and so on. We shall need to look at them all very carefully. None will provide a complete answer, but magistrates will find it valuable to have a full quiver of sentences and disposals. These new ones are therefore to be welcomed in principle.

I want to say a word about the advisory council which is so much sought after by the senior judiciary in the House of Lords. We should carefully contemplate what they are saying, to see whether it can be melded into the Government's proposals in a sensible way. I do not pretend to endorse everything that is being argued for, but we do need a sensible and swift input from those who actually have to exercise sentencing powers. I hope that the Government will consider the idea carefully.

I welcome the Bill in general, but we will need to look closely at the detail. I am rather cynical about the Home Secretary's blithe claim that it fulfils 12 manifesto pledges. I have a feeling that manifesto pledges are not quite as valuable items of currency as some members of the public have hitherto thought them to be. No doubt that will all come out in the wash as we consider the Bill more closely.

We must also be careful not to be too bureaucratic. This is an extremely complex Bill. As a former Attorney-General, I say this against myself: it is extremely difficult to improve drafting, but, as I read the Bill, it passed through my mind that a good many of its clauses could have been drafted more simply and in a shorter form. Perhaps some of us will take a cockshy at introducing simpler and shorter clauses, if only so that we can be told by the Government that we have got our amendments wrong.

I have huge respect for parliamentary draftsmen, but this Bill, like so many others, has been drafted by reference to other Bills, and by reference to others that refer to yet others. It is not easy to read or to understand. It may be capable of improvement, but broadly I wish the Bill well.

6.33 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): The Home Secretary described the purpose of the Bill as being to reduce crime and disorder. I welcome it for that reason, but also for three other reasons.

The first has not been mentioned by anyone in the debate—it is clause 33, which sweeps away the last remaining provision for the death penalty in our civilian law. Many of us had thought that the death penalty was abolished 30 years ago, but it remains on the statute book for the offences of treason and piracy on the high seas. It is about time we tidied up our legislation and made the abolition total.

I am especially pleased because, as Lord Williams of Mostyn pointed out in the other place, clause 33 gives effect to a commitment by the Prime Minister at the Council of Europe summit in October, when the Heads of Government of 40 European countries pledged themselves to work for the abolition of the death penalty in Europe.

It is right and proper to sweep away the dust that has been gathering in some corners of our statute books, and clause 33 does precisely that. It is more than 150 years since anyone was hanged for piracy, and more than 50 years since anyone was hanged for treason. Everyone knows that those offences would not carry the death penalty today, so it is right to tidy up the legislation and to remove any remaining excuse for other countries that still operate the death penalty in Europe to shelter behind the United Kingdom. It is an obsolete provision.

I am glad that our noble Friends Lord Judd and Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, members of our delegation to the Council of Europe Assembly, took part in the debate on an amendment tabled by my noble Friend Lord Archer of Sandwell, who deserves to be congratulated on having taken the initiative in this matter in the other place. That is the first reason for welcoming the Bill.

My second reason is clause 40, which provides for time limits to be specified for serious cases to be heard in court. It was, I believe, the shadow Home Secretary who said that justice delayed was justice denied. Of course, there must be proper provision for the preparation of defences and prosecutions, but when most people argue that cases should be brought to trial as quickly as possible, they draw attention to the effect on the defendant and his family of waiting for the case to be heard.

My own interest in the point arises from my having seen the effect not on a defendant but on a victim's family. It can have a terrible effect on victims and their families if cases take a long time to come to court. We can all imagine how relatives feel when someone has been killed and it then takes more than a year for the case to be heard and the guilty person to be sentenced.

Recently in Birmingham, a 17-year-old student walking through the city centre was the subject of an unprovoked assault by a man who hit him twice on the head with a bottle, punched him three times, knocked him unconscious to the ground, and fractured his skull. The student died. The man who had killed him was arrested within a matter of days.

The killing took place in June 1996; the case came to court in October 1997. Throughout that period, the victim's family had to attend one hearing after another, each time going through the emotional stress of expecting the case to be decided—only to find that it was adjourned to a later date, time and again. They had to go through that process for more than a year, waiting for justice to be done.

This is plainly wrong. My investigations into the reasons for the delay show that it was partly the result of the actions of the defence. It took 11 months from committal to the case being heard in Crown court. Five of those 11 months were the responsibility of the defence, but the rest of the delay was caused by the prosecution, and, in effect, by the legal system.

[Mr. Terry Davis]

I am still not clear about who is responsible. From discussions with Ministers, it appears that nobody is responsible, because responsibility is split between Departments. If ever there was a case for a Minister of Justice, this is it. One person should accept responsibility for the administration of justice, but instead it seems to depend on the convenience of judges and the performance of the Court Service. No one is to blame for delay, and no one accepts responsibility for it, which is unreasonable and unfair, especially on the victim's family.

The third reason for welcoming the Bill is the provision in clause 75 for sentencing guidelines to be made publicly available. They should not only be made available, but be subject to public debate. People are entitled to discuss what is an appropriate range of sentences for a particular crime. In the case that I have described. Royston Worrell, the man who killed the student Andrew Steventon, was found not guilty of murder, but was convicted of manslaughter.

When sentencing Royston Worrell, the judge reminded the court that he had committed an unprovoked assault: he had not been attacked or intimidated in any way, and had killed a young man who was backing away from him and who had offered virtually no defence. In the words of the judge, Royston Worrell wanted to show that he was cock of the walk. He showed no remorse for the death of Andrew Steventon, and there was no suggestion that he had a mental illness.

Royston Worrell was sentenced to four and a half years in prison, and the family of Andrew Steventon have been told by the probation service that the sentence means that Royston Worrell will automatically—it might be better to say, probably—be released after being in prison for two years and seven months.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is entitled to appeal against sentences, but he decided that the sentence was not unduly lenient. In my opinion and that of Andrew Steventon's family, it is unduly lenient—this man killed without provocation. However, when I went to see my right hon. and learned Friend, he convinced me that the sentence is not unduly lenient in comparison with similar cases of brutal manslaughter—undue lenience is not an absolute standard.

I am not in favour of mandatory sentences for manslaughter or for most other crimes. We can all imagine extenuating circumstances even in manslaughter cases. A person who has killed may have been subjected to provocation, frightening intimidation or even sexual abuse over a long period; in the end, something snaps, and that person commits manslaughter. However, an unprovoked assault with a bottle on an innocent passer-by followed by three punches to the head—the assailant travelled a distance of 20 metres when throwing them—deserves more than two years and seven months in prison, most of which would have been spent in custody on remand.

Someone who commits such an assault and who has a previous conviction for an attack with a dangerous weapon must go to prison for longer than that, not only for punishment, but because we and our families deserve to be protected from such a person as we walk the streets of the city of Birmingham. I welcome clause 75, and look forward to the publication of sentencing guidelines, so that we can discuss them and ensure that judges give sentences that the public and hon. Members regard as appropriate.

6.43 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Liberal Democrats welcome many of the measures in the Bill, although we have reservations about it and shall seek to have our questions answered. I agree with a number of hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Peterborough, who warned of the danger of false expectations. In his case, that should be a warning born of experience.

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No, I have only just started my speech. I am sorry; I should have referred to the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney). His warning should be born of experience of annual criminal justice Bills, all of which disappointed the expectations that they created.

When the Home Secretary said that 10 Labour party pledges would be delivered by the Bill, he walked straight into that trap. Legislation does not deliver the outcomes that make a difference. Many of the pledges are valuable, and we want them to be implemented, but they will be implemented only when resources have been made available and the work has been done.

There is no better example of that than the pledge to halve the time that young offenders spend between arrest and sentencing, which I raised with the Home Secretary. Even though it was an early pledge, it will almost certainly not be delivered for several years. We should avoid the temptation of believing that it is legislation, rather than work and the commitment of resources, that gets things done.

I want to make a point of principle about the Bill's construction. We object to significant changes to Scottish law being tacked on to English Bills. Scotland is a nation with its own criminal justice system and judiciary, and the clauses that the Government believe to be urgent should have been dealt with in a separate Bill, which would have allowed Scottish Members to debate them properly. Clauses that are not urgent should have been dealt with by the Scottish Parliament, which will have responsibility for the criminal law in Scotland.

The problem with the way in which the House is dealing with the Bill was shown when my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) intervened on the Home Secretary, who could not answer his point. The right hon. Gentleman said that a Scottish Minister was on the Front Bench, but he is unable to speak in the debate and he is not here now. There will be no interchange on Second Reading between Scottish Members and the Ministers who are responsible for the criminal law in Scotland. That is not a reasonable way to proceed with major Scottish legislation.

Mr. Michael: Three or four Ministers, or three or four shadow Ministers, frequently have a contribution to make in a debate, but we cannot get a quart into a pint pot. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I am working closely with the Minister for Home Affairs and

Devolution, Scottish Office on issues that are of interest to Scotland and to England and Wales. We shall propose that elements of the Bill be grouped for debate in Committee. My hon. Friend will respond to debates on the Scottish sections of the Bill, so that they can be dealt with coherently during detailed consideration in Committee.

Mr. Beith: That will be for the convenience of the Committee, but it will not be for the convenience of Scottish Members who are not members of it. Relatively few Scottish Members will be on the Committee. If the Bill was considered by a Scottish Standing Committee, which would consist largely, if not entirely, of Scottish Members, a wider range of Scottish opinion would be brought to bear on it. The Government are proceeding in the wrong way.

A constructive approach to problems of crime and disorder is long overdue. We had hoped that the Bill might be the start. Crime figures remain far too high, despite the welcome decline in recorded crime, which was reported in the past week. Too many young people are failing to develop constructive lives, and we welcome the Government's recognition in the Bill that more must be done to reduce youth crime. Almost 70 per cent. of people who offend over the age of 21 were first convicted when they were under 21. It is pressing that we tackle youth crime, and challenge and get to the roots of offending behaviour.

Contrary to what Conservative Members have said, the law and order agenda of the previous Government was a pretty miserable affair: it was a mixture of failed promises and measures that did not happen or did not work. They neglected the youth justice system to such an extent that the Audit Commission said in 1996 that more was being done 10 years previously than at that time to deal constructively with young offenders. They presented themselves as the champion of the police, and made pledges in the last Parliament to increase police numbers, but the number of police officers in England and Wales fell by more than 500 between 1992 and 1997. The number has fallen by another 300 since the start of April 1997.

We do not share the former Home Secretary's conviction that the principal solution to crime is to lock more people up for longer. He did little to deal with the falling conviction rates. It is not the case that more and more criminals were being caught, but more, including women and young people, were being locked up for longer. Some had committed offences for which imprisonment was inappropriate.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also did little to increase the number of crime prevention initiatives. His mantra was "Prison works", although, for many people, prison does not work. Yet, while he was repeating that mantra, the very facilities that can help prison to work—education, seconded probation officers working in prisons and specialised programmes to deal with sex offenders—were being cut. I fear that they will continue to be cut, because the resources demanded for security by a rising prison population pre-empt such vital work.

Anyone who thinks that my criticisms are partisan, because they are criticisms of Conservatives by a Liberal Democrat, should read the report of a debate in another place, when three former Conservative Home Secretaries attacked the notion that prison works. Lord Hurd of Westwell said that it could not be right to define the success of our criminal justice system by the number of our fellow citizens being put behind bars. Lord Baker was similarly critical of the superficial and spurious logic of the idea that "prison works". Those views were widely shared, and were espoused even by experienced members of the Conservative party.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I entirely follow what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but does he not agree that it needs to be qualified to some extent? Those who burgle repeatedly ought to receive a substantial prison sentence. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the sentence of three years for a several-times burglar recommended by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the former Home Secretary, was identical to the sentence recommended by the Court of Appeal in a case involving a similar period of offending? That was substantially longer than the 19-month sentence that currently applied.

Mr. Beith: First, I disagree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the principle of mandatory sentencing. Once they are applied, sentences for related offences are ratcheted up, and the prison population is increased with no regard to the circumstances of the case involved.

I also disagree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman about what should be done with a "repeat burglar". What should be done is whatever is likely to bring home to him the gravity of his offences and have a punitive effect, while also making it probable that, when he is eventually released, he will not continue to be a repeat burglar. Those are the two issues which are most in people's minds. If prison is the most expensive and least effective way of securing such a result, we had better look for another way.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No. I have just given way, and I want to make some progress.

In certain circumstances, we should consider what other forms of sentence combine punitive elements with some prospect of ensuring that the prisoner leads a useful life when he leaves prison. It is no good if all we have done, as taxpayers, is fork out a great deal of money for someone to be fed, clothed and kept in prison, if, at the end of the day, that person comes out of prison and continues to offend.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I have just given way; I want to make some progress.

In a *New Statesman* interview published last week, the present Home Secretary sounded entirely unapologetic for the continuing rise in the prison population. He said:

"If crime is rising, the prison population is bound to rise."

In simple terms, that seems obvious; but, as I have said, the rise in the prison population is not a result of more people being caught, but a result of the increasing tendency to use prison where alternatives were used before.

[Mr. Beith]

Between 1992 and 1996, the propensity of Crown courts to use prison as a sentence rose by nearly 50 per cent., and the propensity of magistrates courts to use prison has doubled. That is the main cause of the rise in the prison population. Is the Home Secretary saying that that is entirely right? Is he content with it, or does he believe, as we do, that the change means that some people are being sent to prison who would be better dealt with by other measures?

Of course, serious and violent offenders should be imprisoned, but should single mothers who have defaulted on fines be there as well? In many instances, prison is an expensive way of making offenders worse, and more likely to commit offences. Is the Home Secretary content with the fact that, as a result of all this, the Prison Service is under such pressure that it must concentrate on containment rather than reducing the incidence of reoffending, which must be one of the main purposes of the vast and increasing amount that we are spending on prisons?

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way to me. I am following his speech carefully, but does he not recognise that hon. Members—regardless of which party they represent—must think first of the victims? Does he not accept that victims want above all to ensure that the "repeat burglar" to whom the right hon. Gentleman has referred is taken out of circulation, so that he cannot burgle again for a long time?

Mr. Beith: If the result of the policies pursued in dealing with that burglar is that many more victims are created than would be created by another means of dealing with the problem, we shall have done society no good. Victims of burglaries often become very angry when there is no proper response to what has happened to them. There is a pathetically low detection rate: the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) cited horrific figures from his constituency. That, along with the frequent inability of hard-pressed police to take sufficient action in individual cases, is the cause of most of the complaints that I hear from victims. But what about all the future victims who will suffer if we pursue the wrong policies? We hope that the current Government will signal a real departure from Howardism in that respect, but we are yet to be convinced: so far, the signal is very mixed.

We believe that the Government should introduce the most effective measures possible to protect the public, reassure victims, prevent crime and reoffending, and ensure justice. On the whole, the Bill is heading in the right direction, but we feel that, in some respects, it is unnecessarily authoritarian, that some measures are not based on sound research and that it does not do enough to channel resources into constructive action. We welcome the introduction of local multi-agency crime prevention bodies: that is a sensible and constructive measure, which may be why it was not introduced during all those years of Conservative government, despite the recommendation in the Morgan report.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): My right hon. Friend is right: the Morgan report lay on the shelf for far too long.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most effective and best-costed policing plans of police authorities are based on the building blocks of the local unit of command—the district or divisional commander, working closely with the local authority and the local community? Does he share my disappointment at the lack of clarity in the Bill about the relationship between the local authority strategies that are needed, and the cost of policing plans—and about how the two knit together?

Mr. Beith: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not think that the drafting of the Bill is clear in that regard. Clarity does not necessarily depend entirely on drafting, but someone reading the Bill might not realise how the system ought to work. For instance, I feel that in two-tier local government areas district councils have an important part to play, and district councils often correspond—either by themselves or with other districts—to police command areas within police authority areas. Those are more local and immediate units than some of the larger police areas, and a crime prevention strategy needs that local focus. I am sure the Minister agrees that that is how matters should proceed, although the drafting does not make it clear.

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Gentleman is right. It is also important—there has been some misunderstanding about this—that county councils in two-tier areas play a full part in district council strategy. Neither tier should be left out.

Mr. Beith: That is true, but there is sometimes a bit of jealously between counties and districts. Counties sometimes want to take over more of the responsibility than is appropriate, given the need to engage local communities much more fully in crime prevention.

My problem is that the county council in my part of the world is more than a little old Labour. However, we support the introduction of local youth teams, and the creation of a national Youth Justice Board. We strongly support Lord Ackner's amendment asking for the creation of a standing advisory council on the criminal justice and appeals system. It was opposed by both Front Benches, but it recognises that crime is a complex phenomenon which requires a considered and comprehensive response. If the present Government genuinely reject the ways of the previous Government, they should show their commitment to openness and sound research by accepting that proposal, or a modified version of it. I found the arguments used against it largely trivial: they could be summarised as "Do not give me any good advice, because I might have to take it". Given the experience of the previous Home Secretary, we can imagine the way in which soundly based research advice was received in his office. I think that the new Government should break with that tradition, and recognise that a standing body can work efficiently and expeditiously, and create a climate of consensus in regard to sensible measures.

We recognise the need for many of the new orders in the rest of chapter I of the Bill, but we feel that in some cases the standard of evidence required is too weak, and that the potential sanctions are too strong in relation to the procedure involved. Definitions are vague, and judicial discretion is too limited. I am sceptical about whether the parenting orders will be of much value in practice. We fully support developing parental support, education in

parenting and help for parents; we believe in parental responsibility. The Government run the risk of fining and ultimately imprisoning law-abiding parents for the actions of out-of-control children and finding that the orders are useless in dealing with parents who are themselves the cause of young persons' problems. A young person may be escaping from some of their criminal activities.

We welcome the proposals for the creation of racially aggravated offences, and share the belief that that sends a message that racism is unacceptable in this country. We are pleased that the Government have accepted the Liberal Democrat argument in another place to extend the principle to racially aggravated criminal damage. We want to look more closely at some outstanding issues in this part of the Bill, and we ask the Government to consider whether it would be appropriate to extend the principle to crimes that are motivated by the sexual orientation of the victim. We must look at the issue in that context.

In the area of youth justice, we welcome the introduction of a statement on the principal aim of the youth justice system. I wrote to the Home Secretary in November suggesting that he should do just that. There is a need to widen the statement to include the balancing of welfare and justice considerations, which is at the heart of much of the lack of public confidence in the youth justice system. Many people feel that the system is too welfare oriented and that it ought to have regard to justice and reparation to society. The balancing of those matters must be clear in the statement.

We would also appreciate the Government's thinking on extending the practice and principles of the Scottish child hearings system to England and Wales. It is a proven system in Scotland. Why is more attention not being paid to how much we could learn from how well that system works, when considering the reforms in England and Wales on which people are embarking?

We support measures to cut delays, particularly in the youth justice system. Sensible procedural changes can be made, but I do not think that improvements can be obtained on the cheap without risking delays and bottlenecks elsewhere in the system. If a rigorous target is set but fresh resources are not provided, the chances are that some other part of the system will pay the price. All the attention is shifted, and problems arise elsewhere. I questioned the Home Secretary earlier about my doubts as to when he will be able to meet the pledge on persistent young offenders.

We are disappointed that, for the time being, the Government will continue the practice of holding remanded 15 and 16-year-olds in prison, which is contrary to what they said in opposition. We share the fears of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders that sending juvenile defendants to penal establishments is a

"recipe for criminal contamination, intimidation and, all too often, self-harm and suicide attempts".

Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons recently provided us with his hard-hitting and thorough thoughts on that and related issues. I hope that the Government will heed those words. It is unacceptable to continue to increase the likelihood that young offenders will continue to offend by putting them in adult penal institutions.

We are opposed in principle to local child curfews. We think that they are a heavy-handed gimmick. It was a good idea for grabbing headlines in the run-up to the election, but it is not a good idea in practice or an appropriate response to young people under the age of 10 being on the streets at night. It is impractical to such an extent that the Home Secretary seems to be admitting that it is an experiment rather than a solid proposal.

I asked what research the proposal was based on, and I received a vague answer. I do not think there is any research evidence to show that a child curfew system is needed or will work. There is nothing it could do that powers in the Children Act 1989 or common-sense action by a police officer who sees a child wandering around late at night could not do. It could have damaging effects in terms of signalling to younger people that they will be subject to collective punishment and that their overall civil rights can be taken away. I do not think that such a system would be much used.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): One of the most disturbing sights when I was campaigning last year before the general election was of children as young as eight, nine and 10 on the streets at 9.30 or 10 o'clock at night. Current powers have failed to protect those children and to make sure that they are not on the streets at that time of night.

Mr. Beith: I do not think that the response to a disturbing sight is a curfew. If a police officer finds children wandering the streets and clearly at risk late at night, he has an opportunity to talk to them or to take them home. Social services departments can use Children Act powers for such purposes. The notion of saying, "This is a no-go area for children" is unsatisfactory. Many of us played cricket in the street until it was dark, and in my part of the world it gets dark at 11.15 pm in the summer. We did not expect to be told that, thanks to the local council, a curfew had been imposed and that there would be no more cricket.

The right hon. Member for Gorton probably thinks that a curfew should be in force by about 5 or 6 o'clock. Other Labour Members think that a curfew should extend to an older age group. Before long, we would be back to the days when people shut the gates of the town that I represent and tolled a curfew bell, which still rings at 10 past 8, so that everybody could be safely locked up in their homes. We may find that a curfew would be contrary to the provisions of the European convention on human rights, which the Government are properly ensuring can be enforced in our courts.

I should like to speak about the serious issue of sex offenders and what should be done about such offenders who have been released and about whom there is so much public concern. On television at the weekend, the Minister of State said that, in consultation with others, he was developing some ideas on what could be done. Let us see them in the form of a Government amendment in Committee. Let us begin to discuss the matter openly and not confine the discussion to the Home Office. If, after detailed examination, it seems that the ideas are not developed to a form that will allow them to be included in the Bill, the new clause or amendment that contains them could be withdrawn. Why should we go through the process of debating a Bill in this Session when the

[Mr. Beith]

Government say that they cannot look at such matters until a possible new Bill is being drafted in the next Session?

Mr. Michael: It would not be responsible to present half-formed amendments simply to stimulate debate. The Home Secretary made it clear earlier that when ideas have been worked up he will present information to the House to allow a debate. The right hon. Gentleman should give us credit for the fact that we have been open. We have told people that we are trying to find solutions to these difficult problems. Rather than simply mounting a defensive exercise, we have said, "Let us deal with these problems openly. Let us discuss them."

Mr. Beith: My definition of openness is not saying that one intends to be open, but presenting proposals. That is not a criticism of the Government, but they should get away from the idea that they will lose face if they present proposals in an early form and are obliged to change them or even take them away because, on examination, they prove to be unsatisfactory. The public would like the process to begin now. To process the Bill without considering that seems odd.

The Government must acknowledge that many of the tools that are available to reduce crime will not be in the Bill and cannot even be found within Home Office powers. They involve most other Departments, especially those that deal with local services and communities. They include creating opportunities, promoting positive activities, providing education and training, creating pride in local areas and environments, diverting young people away from crime and improving the child care system, through which so many offenders have passed in their formative years. They have often been in residential parts of the child care system or have experienced unsatisfactory foster care. The majority of those that one encounters in any prison have been through an unsatisfactory aspect of our child care system.

In a sense, it is not even the fault of Home Office Ministers that they cannot solve all the problems of crime. The fault lies much wider and that is a lesson for government as a whole. Introducing a criminal justice Bill every year, a practice which was developed by the previous Government, will have a much more marginal effect on crime than some of the issues that I have listed, and it will have a much more limited effect on the extent to which crime continues to cause so much distress to our constituents.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches now applies.

7.8 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): The legislation is welcome. It is the work of a Home Secretary and a Government who are determined to address the tidal wave of yobbery that accompanied the Thatcher decade. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes it did, and made a misery of the lives of so many of our constituents. It is evidence that a clear sense of purpose and strategic vision are in the process of being restored to our criminal justice system.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mullin: I am confined to 10 minutes, so I will not give way. Forgive me.

I welcome the measures that are designed to deal more effectively with youth crime and to render youth justice, which, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has sometimes said, resembles a secret garden, more effective. I welcome especially the measures to speed it up. The abolition of the presumption that children who are aged between 10 and 14 do not know the difference between right and wrong is long overdue; I am not persuaded by the argument that that rule has been in place since the reign of Edward III. I welcome, too, other measures that are designed to encourage young offenders to confront their crimes and to make reparation to their victims.

I do not share the view that the Bill is too repressive. For far too long, it has been apparent that our criminal justice system is utterly ineffective against persistent young offenders. For too long, police and local authorities have been tearing their hair out with frustration at their inability to contain that small minority of juveniles who run amok and make the lives of law-abiding people a misery.

Parts of my constituency and those of some of my colleagues have been rendered uninhabitable by out-of-control juveniles, who simply laugh at the law and its representatives. Other hon. Members have quoted examples from their experience. At my surgeries, I am regularly faced with refugees from the poorer parts of my constituency who beg to be evacuated because their lives have been ruined by criminal youths, against whom the law appears to be ineffective.

Last year, an elderly gentleman came to see me who had made the mistake of buying his council home in a once respectable area that was subsequently destroyed by yobbery. As a result, he is trapped. His neighbours, all council tenants, were rehoused years ago, but he is marooned in an unsaleable house that is surrounded by dereliction. Four houses on either side of his are vandalised and boarded up. Behind him, nine or 10 consecutive houses have been abandoned.

Caroline Flint: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mullin: I cannot because I have only 10 minutes. Forgive me.

Some houses have been fire-bombed. That gentleman has a net over his greenhouse to catch incoming missiles. When his wife died just over a year ago, even the cars of the mourners came under attack from stone-throwing youths. That poor man sits at home at night in terror of the next brick coming through his window, so when someone talks to me about civil liberties, I say, "What about the civil liberties of my constituent? What about the civil liberties of men and women who break down in tears at my surgeries as they describe the anti-social behaviour that is going on around them, which has blighted their lives and those of their children?"

I do not mean to suggest, and I am sure the Secretary of State does not mean to suggest, that the Bill is any kind of panacea. The Thatcher decade, when it was every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost, has left us with a legacy that will take years to repair. The bills are still coming in. The genie is out of the bottle and will not easily be put back. For years, we have been manufacturing, almost as an act of policy, an underclass of unskilled alienated youths who are a danger to themselves and to everyone around them.

It will take more than a single Act of Parliament to resolve the crisis, but the Bill is a good start. To work, it will require police, local authorities and other agencies to work together. I am glad that this is beginning to happen in my constituency. The Bill will add some new weapons to the armoury of the people who are doing their best to clear up the mess that was left by years of neglect, but no one pretends that it will solve all the problems.

Nor, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, should the Bill be viewed in isolation. It represents only part of a coherent strategy for restoring our battered social fabric. In the long run, the only way in which to make a real difference is to put young people back in touch with the world of work and education: to give them a reason to get up in the morning and a purpose in life. That is the object of the welfare-to-work programme that was launched earlier this week, and the Bill should be viewed in that context.

It will be alleged—indeed, it has been alleged—that some of the Bill's measures—child curfews, for example—are hopelessly impractical. I do not think that we should get too hung up on that. They will be pilot schemes. They are discretionary and, if they do not work, we can try something else.

I see the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed laughing, but he rightly said that Governments should not be afraid to back down if something does not work. Personally, I think that this will work in some areas, in some circumstances, but let us see and let us not get too hung up about it. Let us not be too dogmatic or prescriptive. What is important is to find out what works and what does not. What does not can be discarded. The important point about the Bill is that it widens the armoury of measures that are available to people in the front line.

I have two other more general points. First, nothing in the Bill should be an excuse for increasing the overall prison population. Indeed, I hope that one or two of its measures—home detention curfew, for example—will reduce the prison population. Prison does not work except as an expensive means of containment and then only for so long as containment lasts. The present mushrooming prison population is jeopardising all progress—I acknowledge that there was progress under the previous Government—in providing humane and constructive regimes. We have urgently to find viable, effective alternatives to imprisonment where those are appropriate. The Select Committee on Home Affairs is examining that matter.

Secondly, if we are to make a serious impact on disorder, we have to reverse the huge increase in the number of school exclusions. Where children are excluded, we have to ensure that a programme exists either to help them back into school or to provide a meaningful alternative. All too often, that is not happening. Only the other day, a man came to my surgery and pointed out that two excluded primary school children in his neighbourhood seemed to spend most of their days hanging around the streets.

If that trend is allowed to continue, we are storing up big problems for ourselves. Technically, of course, it is a matter for the Department for Education and Employment, but the Home Office has an obvious interest, because, as sure as night follows day, today's excluded schoolchildren will be tomorrow's criminals.

In passing, I welcome clause 33, which abolishes the death penalty for treason and piracy. Life imprisonment for

"slandering, the King, Queen or heirs"

still seems a little on the steep side, but at least we are removing an anomaly that is becoming an embarrassment to us in international forums where we urge abolition of the death penalty on countries such as Russia.

I touch on a matter that is not addressed in the Bill, but was mentioned briefly by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed: diversion. So much of the Home Office budget is spent either on policing or locking up criminals, but almost nothing is spent on diverting vulnerable young people, who can often be identified at an early stage, into constructive activity and away from temptation. Breakout, an excellent scheme in my constituency, operates during school holidays, providing youngsters in one of the most desolate parts of Sunderland with constructive activity, including trips to the seaside and countryside, which, although only a few miles away, they might never otherwise see.

Every year, the scheme caters for 600 or 700 kids. The total cost is less than £30,000—the equivalent of locking up one juvenile for nine months. However, the money has to be raised piecemeal. The organisers never know from one year to the next where the funds will come from. The city council, the police, local businesses, Save the Children Fund and even the Member of Parliament chip in.

It is time that more attention was paid to diversion and that such schemes were properly funded. They should be held up as examples of best practice, and funding should be placed on a stable basis. It is far more cost effective than having to pick up the pieces after the damage has been done. Perhaps the Secretary of State will consult his colleagues in the Department of the Environment and other relevant Departments and come forward with a stable funding plan for a nationwide programme of diversion.

The Bill is a major step forward. It should be viewed not in isolation, but, alongside welfare to work, as part of a coherent strategy for repairing our damaged social fabric after two decades of neglect. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends and commend the Bill to the House.

7.18 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I pay tribute to the previous Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), under whom crime figures dropped for several years, and to the current Home Secretary and his Minister of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), whom I have always found thoughtful and constructive in their approach to the serious problems that we are dealing with.

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

Crime figures have risen inexorably in the past 20 years, particularly those for violent crime. Members of Parliament often seem powerless in the face of that. Every year, we pass criminal justice legislation, full of hope, but the figures carry on getting worse. Perhaps it has something to do with the way in which we operate. Perhaps such matters should be dealt with by Select Committees rather than Standing Committees to allow hon. Members from both sides with a common interest in tackling the problems of crime and law and order to discuss matters and move forward away from the normal antagonism of party politics.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North–East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Malins: No, I have no time.

An all-party approach on these critical issues would be greatly preferable.

The Bill deals largely with youth crime. I congratulate the Home Secretary on focusing on that area. He will realise that crime is not just a Home Office problem. It also concerns the Department for Education and Employment. A good school is not merely one that turns out pupils with a large number of grade As at GCSE—a good school spots discipline problems and truancy early and takes steps to deal with them, because they can lead to crime; a good school encourages sport, particularly among young boys, because that can turn them away from crime; a good school produces pupils who do not turn out to be criminals, but who deserve a grade A in good citizenship.

Come with me on a trip to one of the courts where I sit as a recorder or stipendiary magistrate. Have a look at the average defendant in front of me. He is almost certainly a young man of 18 or 19. He has had a rotten education and has never had a job. He has come from a broken home and has bad housing. His parents do not give a damn and do not even turn up at court to support him in his moment of trial. Juvenile crime is a huge problem which gets worse and worse. In the long term, it will be immensely damaging to this country.

Far too many of those young people are involved not just in crime, but in drugs. I was sorry that the Home Secretary did not say much about drugs. As the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said, diversion from crime is an important issue. We are top of the European league for the number of 15-year-olds experimenting with cannabis, ecstasy or amphetamines. The link between drugs and crime is clear and must be dealt with. I forgot to tell the House that the odds are that the young man in court whom I mentioned a moment ago is a drug addict. He is in court for burglary. He burgles not because he wants the goods, but because he needs to sell them to raise money to fund his heroin habit, which can cost £500 or £600 a week.

When that young man goes to prison, the situation will be no better, because drugs will be freely available. Barristers regularly plead with me not to send their client to prison because drugs will be more freely available there than outside. In 1996–97, there were 21,700 positive drugs tests among prisoners. In spite of the good efforts of many charities in prisons, the problem has not been dealt with properly. We must break the vicious circle of drugs leading to crime, leading to prison, leading to release, leading to more drugs.

I welcome the drug treatment and testing order in the Bill, but more needs to be done. The appointment of a drugs tsar is probably gesture politics. Prisons need to be totally cleaned out of drugs. We must conduct research into whether there should be compulsory medical treatment of drug addicts. Research in America with the drug naltrexone has been useful. There is an increasingly strong argument that those who sell class A drugs should be treated more harshly by the courts because they purvey great evil and are responsible for a huge and disproportionate amount of crime.

Where do parents fit in? They fit in a lot better if there are two of them. Many of those who appear before me come from one-parent or broken families. We should make divorce more difficult and strive much harder to keep parents together for the sake of children, buttressing marriage in every way possible through tax breaks to keep families together. I am worried about the parenting order, because I do not think that requiring them to attend counselling and guidance sessions weekly will work. It is fanciful and unrealistic to expect to be able to compel people to be good parents. Good parents do not need such an order and bad parents will put two fingers up to it. Parents who do not turn up to court to support their children—parents who do not care—are likely to put a brick down the throat of anyone who visits them with an order to attend court for parenting lessons. That is the reality of life. The orders are fanciful and bureaucratic. A breach by a parent on supplementary benefit resulting in a fine of £3,000 will only clog up the means lists of our courts and will get us nowhere. Too much bureaucracy is involved.

There are some questions about the anti-social behaviour orders. What is the difference between the clauses on anti-social behaviour orders and sections 4 and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986? They are both summary only. Why will an offence under the Bill be indictable as well as non-indictable? Why might a breach of an order result in five years in prison on indictment for a juvenile, whereas someone offending under sections 4 and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 would have no such stringent penalty?

I congratulate the Home Secretary on many aspects of the Bill, but more examination is needed. There is not enough emphasis on the problems of drugs. My constituents are troubled not just by crime, but by the perception of crime. The Government must find the money for more closed circuit television. They should spend rather less on speed cameras and police cars and rather more on police boots, because boots are made for walking. People throughout the country want to see more policemen walking the beat, because that provides them with a great deal of comfort. I wish the Bill good luck.

7.28 pm

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. The issues are of huge importance to the people of Salford. I found some of the comments by the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) depressing and pessimistic. The Bill is full of hope for the people of the constituency that I do my best to represent.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for visiting Salford last week. He spent a great deal of time with local people in one of the most besieged

communities in the country. He came to Langworthy, in Salford, and spoke with local people about the huge problems that they face, not only with crime but with disorder.

I should like briefly to give the House some statistics, because the volume of crime in my city is overwhelming. My communities are under seige and in crisis. I think that hon. Members will be genuinely shocked by the figures from only the past four weeks. In the past four weeks, in the police F Division, we have had 180 burglaries of dwellings and 168 burglaries of business premises. We have had 255 vehicles stolen, and 207 thefts from vehicles. We have also had 76 woundings—in a four-week period.

As for disorder, we have had 356 incidents of juvenile nuisance and 138 domestic disputes. We have had 445 various "suspicious circumstances". We have also had 1,228 incidents that were not recorded as "crimes". In a four-week period, 1,431 key crimes have been recorded in F Division.

The volume of crime daily facing local people is what grinds them down and depresses their spirit. I believe that the Bill's provisions will give them the morale and confidence that they need to begin to fight back.

Many local people are frightened and intimidated by the prospect of even getting involved in reporting crime. I remind the House that the horrific figures I have quoted deal with only recorded crime. All hon. Members know that under those figures are many layers of crimes and incidents that go unreported because people do not want to become involved. They fear harassment, intimidation and retribution. Such fears are why we have had to establish in our city, not only a witness support scheme, but a witness protection scheme—to protect witnesses from the very real fear of personal violence that some criminals, given half a chance, would mete out to them.

Police in our city are working extremely hard to tackle the problems. A recent operation—Operation Jellyfish—was aimed specifically at youngsters aged between 10 and 14, and involved video surveillance. Police videoed youngsters committing crimes—such as theft from vehicles, damage and all types of vandalism and anti-social behaviour—and then visited parents with that video evidence.

Previously, when police went round to young people's homes to accuse children of involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime, parents—perhaps some of those parents mentioned by the hon. Member for Woking, who do not care about their children—often said, "My son or daughter couldn't possibly have been involved in that crime." However, when faced with video evidence, parents' reactions have been tremendously encouraging. Some of those parents have begun to take responsibility for their children's actions, because the evidence has been incontrovertible.

In my city, we have to rely on video surveillance and police action, as local people are finding it very difficult to come forward, because of intimidation, to give evidence against their neighbours. In many cases, we know the identity of the criminals who are committing one offence after another. In Salford, unfortunately, good families—rather than the criminals, who are not apprehended or dealt with effectively—are living behind bars and numerous locks, almost in steel cages.

Problems in many inner-city areas, such as Salford, are about not only crime but disorder. Although our police can probably cope with some of our most serious crimes, the detection rate in Greater Manchester—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said—is appalling. I am sure that a similar situation prevails across the country.

Disorder causes police the most problems. If police are to deal with serious crime, they cannot constantly be on the streets trying to control behaviour in the community. Orders dealing with anti-social behaviour will be most useful in dealing with that type of situation. They will apply to anti-social families, who often roam the streets of my city with impunity, causing misery and mayhem to the decent people who are trying to uphold standards.

The anti-social behaviour orders will be especially useful because the civil burden of proof, rather than the current higher standard, will apply. The orders will therefore be easier to obtain. Obtaining evidence also will be easier, as such a heavy burden will not be placed on local people. Currently, they are required to come forward personally to give evidence, and subsequently to face retribution. Breaching an order may result in a sentence of up to five years, which may well cause some criminals in our communities to think twice about doing so.

The proposed reparation orders will confront young criminals with the effects of their crimes on their victims, and make them repair the damage that they have caused. The orders will be more effective than the numerous cautions and fines that are currently imposed. Some criminals have absolutely no intention of paying their fines.

Curfews imposed on youngsters under 10 have been criticised by some hon. Members for potentially being ineffective. However, curfews will send out a message in the community that it is not right for youngsters under 10 to be roaming the streets—not only at 9.30 pm, but, in my city, at 11 or 12 at night. I know a youngster of six who regularly sleeps in the park. Such things are happening in our inner-city areas. If we have to resort to measures such as curfews, so be it. I agree that they are a drastic measure, and I do not want people's freedom to be limited. I remember being out fairly late at night when growing up in Salford—the inner-city—but it was a safe place to be. It is no longer a safe place to be for youngsters, because of the influences to which they are exposed, the damage that is done to them, and the abuse to which they might be subjected on the streets of our cities. As I said, if we need curfews, so be it.

The Bill's provisions will start to bring confidence back to our communities, which, in recent years, have had the heart knocked out of them. Conservative Members are reluctant to accept the link between unemployment, poverty, family breakdown, the benefit culture and crime, but those factors are undoubtedly related. My city is living evidence that mass unemployment has a dramatic effect not only on crime but on community disorder.

Things are beginning to change in my city, and I should like to give one or two examples of positive ways in which local authorities, police and communities are working together to tackle the problems. Their actions will be helped and reinforced by the Bill's provisions.

We have the safer Salford scheme, in which our local authority is spending half a million pounds annually on closed circuit television, security, fencing, creating areas

[Ms Hazel Blears]

of defensible space and youth outreach work. The youth outreach work is not being done in youth clubs, as some of our children will not go to them, but by sending youth workers out to estates and the areas of greatest disorder. They are bringing in youngsters and re-engaging them with the community.

Extra police officers have been funded by our single regeneration budget. In one case, a local housing association has provided funds to secure extra police officers to help in improving an area in which its properties are located. By focusing the work of dedicated police officers on the areas of greatest need, we will begin to restore order where there is currently mostly chaos.

No longer do we have problems with disorder only on large council estates. The biggest disorder problems in my constituency are in areas of privately rented property belonging to absentee landlords. One area has 200 absentee landlords, who do not vet their tenants but will put anyone in housing simply to get the housing benefit. Those landlords have no stake in the community. Our communities have dissolved almost overnight because of uncaring landlords who are interested only in a quick profit. We will have fundamentally to address that issue.

In Salford, we have a couple of excellent schemes, such as the Street to Stadium Trust, which is trying to divert young people from crime by using sport, art and other activities to re-engage them. Those schemes say to youngsters, "You will not be written off. You have talents and skills. Let us help you to make the most of them, rather than being involved in crime and anti-social behaviour."

At our local high school, we have embarked on an experiment of an alternative curriculum for youngsters who, by 14 or 15, are completely disaffected from school. The curriculum has been in operation for only two terms, and applies to a group of 20 youngsters. Last year, those youngsters rarely attended school. They were truanting and on the verge of permanent exclusion, which would, inevitably, have been followed by involvement in crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have to cut the hon. Lady's speech short.

7.38 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I greatly welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, particularly because it gives me a chance to speak about one or two aspects of the Bill—in which I have had a long-standing interest, especially its provisions dealing with serious crime committed by juveniles. However, I should like to say first that it is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) and the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), both of whom made powerful speeches, to which the House will have listened with great care.

Like the hon. Member for Salford, I welcome the success of closed circuit television. I share her concerns about absentee landlords. However, there are grave concerns that Labour Members have been unwilling to recognise what the Home Secretary graciously recognised in his opening speech: many of the successes have been the result of the previous Conservative Government's actions.

Conservative Members have been greatly concerned that, over many years, Labour authorities have been working hand in glove with a number of absentee landlords who have been tied up with local government corruption in many cities. I use those words advisedly. *[Interruption.]* In many documented cases, those links have been proven. The hon. Lady should look at the record of Labour councils and their links with absentee landlords and those involved in housing benefit fraud.

Mrs. Anne McGuire (Stirling): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I will not, because I have only 10 minutes in which to speak. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) refused to take my interventions because of the time limit. I shall not be able to take interventions either.

I agree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, South about the importance of recognising the need to devise alternatives to custody where possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking and I serve on the Select Committee on Home Affairs, which the hon. Gentleman chairs. Yesterday morning, when some members of the Select Committee visited Sherborne house, we had the opportunity to see a good example of a project that provides an alternative to custody. I pay tribute to the dedicated and experienced senior probation officers who are running that project with great success. It deals particularly with people who would otherwise have faced custodial sentences for muggings and street crime.

It may come as a surprise to my hon. Friends to hear me, as someone who has always been a tough law and order spokesman, supporting any idea of alternatives to custody, but I recognise that there are occasions when the courts look for a way in which to break somebody's cycle of drugs, imprisonment, more drugs and more imprisonment, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Woking referred. Projects such as the one that members of the Select Committee saw yesterday can provide an opportunity to break that cycle.

I refer to one or two specific aspects of the Bill. I hope that, if I am lucky with the Committee of Selection, I shall be able to serve on the Committee that scrutinises the Bill, so that I can go into greater detail than I can in only 10 minutes. The Bill has been referred to as something of a Christmas tree—anything can be hung on it. I hope that that is not so. I prefer to describe the Bill as a portmanteau. There are many good aspects to it—and that is no surprise.

Recently, as the Home Secretary was generous enough to acknowledge, there has been more of a bipartisan approach to criminal justice. Many of the Bill's proposals were originally planned when the previous Government were in office. Before Labour Members take too much credit and say that this is a wonderful new Labour Bill, they should remember that most of its proposals came forward under the previous Government. If the verdict of the electorate had been different—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members, some of whom have not been in the House very long, may smile, but if they check the facts with their Front-Bench team, they will realise that many of the Bill's proposals were coming forward anyway. We all know that, and the Minister knows that better than anyone.

One can trace the history of many of the proposals in many of the speeches and policy documents of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and

Hythe (Mr. Howard) when he was Home Secretary. The Minister and I have debated these issues many times, particularly in the 180 hours of debate on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, when he was in opposition. He knows that many of proposals before us owe their origins to that Bill and subsequent Bills during the previous Parliament.

I particularly welcome the provisions on electronic tagging. To reinforce my earlier point and the fact that we on the Conservative Benches so much welcome the belated conversion of Labour Members to some of the things in which Conservatives have always believed, I shall quote the words of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the then Labour spokesman, who said in a debate on the Criminal Justice Bill in 1990:

"Electronic monitoring is a dangerous and irrelevant concept. It is wrong in principle . . . It has enormous implications for civil liberties".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 18 December 1990; c. 274.]

We recognise the Labour party's very belated but none the less welcome conversion to matters in which we have always believed, such as electronic tagging.

I share the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), about the importance of young people not being out on the streets late at night. Although there was some hilarity when she intervened, she was quite right. All of us as Members of Parliament worry when we see very small children on the streets at 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock at night. We know that the parents of those children are irresponsible. We know that, sometimes very sadly, those children's lives are tragically ended when they fall into the hands of the very paedophiles whom the Government are rightly taking steps to control. The Bill encourages good parents to be sensible and ensures that the courts have powers to impose curfews when parents are not sensible. That is one of the most welcome aspects of the Bill.

From my experience of practising at the Bar in courts, particularly juvenile courts, my years serving on the Bar Council and from three years on its inner cabinet, I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking about drugs in prison. One of the ways in which I would like to toughen the Bill—I hope that we shall succeed in doing so in Committee—is by taking further steps to control the use of drugs by those serving prison sentences. It is absolutely right that we take firm steps to try to ensure that prisons become, as far as possible, drug-free zones. We know that that is not so at the moment.

As my hon. Friend said, defence advocates frequently present cases to him and many others who sit as recorders, assistant recorders and judges, that allowing a defendant to go to prison will worsen his drug problem because of the extent of drug use in prison. We must stop that, and the Bill may give us an opportunity to toughen controls on drugs in prisons, particularly drugs supplied by those visiting convicted prisoners serving sentences.

We sought to address the problem by increasing search powers in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. The Minister may remember, because he was the Opposition spokesman on that Bill, that we were able to toughen powers for police officers to search for drugs. I remember in particular that the former Member for Milton Keynes, North-East and I tabled an amendment that gave greater powers to search for drugs under somebody's hat, because drugs were often hidden under the hats of Rastafarian criminals and Rastafarian visitors of those serving sentences. That was well known to everyone. It may sound trivial, but for police officers and prison officers, the point was valid. That is a small example, but one which I hope will point the way to opportunities to toughen provisions in the Bill.

Before I run out of time, I want to refer to the matter first raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), the former Attorney-General, about clause 50. The Government added it to the Bill only in the House of Lords, but I think that they will think again about it. As my right hon. and learned Friend rightly said, there is great concern that prosecution duties, even in uncontested hearings, are to be given to people who are not legally qualified. As I said in my intervention on him, it is a duty of any prosecutor in court to raise any relevant matters. Serious offences may be dealt with in uncontested hearings. This is not a matter of circling the wagons to defend the legal profession. It is of concern that somebody who understands the law should consider serious offences and matters affecting the liberty of the subject.

7.48 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I want to make three main points. Colleagues have spoken about the effect that the legislation might have on their constituencies. Before I talk about that, I should say that not all the youth of Britain are throwing bricks through windows. Not all the young ladies of Britain are single, unmarried mothers. Not everybody who lives on an estate in my constituency is a criminal. In fact, the vast majority are not; they are good citizens seeking to earn a living, if they can get a job. They want decency, security in their old age and opportunities for their children. We should bear that in mind. The purpose of the Bill is to protect precisely those people.

I want to read out an extract from the *Hull Daily Mail*, my local newspaper, of 27 March. Under the headline "Vandals halt estate buses", an article states:

"Night-time buses to a Hull estate have been cancelled after a series of vandal attacks.

Stagecoach has pulled the plug on services to Bransholme between 6.30pm and 9.30pm until next Wednesday, after bricks were thrown through windows of their vehicles.

The attacks have been carried out by children as young as 10-years-old.

In one incident on Monday, a piece of rock was hurled through a window with such force that it travelled the width of the bus and out through the other side . . .

Two years ago, children believed to be as young as four were blamed for attacking buses on Bransholme, injuring passengers and drivers and causing £6,000 of damage."

That is horrendous, but it is made even more so by the fact that there is only one road into the remote north Bransholme estate and one road out. There is only one bus service and, because of the poverty, very few people own cars.

The behaviour of those louts and young kids has not only led to criminal damage—which is important but not as important as the danger inflicted on bus drivers and passengers—but has put an estate almost under siege,

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

albeit in an entirely different way from that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears). In any event, it prevented old people from going to bingo. People could not get home from work without having to walk on dark nights, as they were then, through narrow lanes along that road. People were in considerable fear.

What is there in the Bill to deal with children in that age range? There are parenting orders, parental control orders, child safety orders and anti-social behaviour orders, all of which could help to deal with the age range involved in the incident that I have outlined and with their parents. Like other hon. Members, I have seen children of six or seven pushing babies in pushchairs. That is frightening, and something has to be done. It is not a question of wanting a nanny or draconian state; it is a question of ensuring young people's safety.

I deal now with absentee landlords, who were also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford. The previous Government poured millions of pounds into the south part of the Bransholme estate, but the council tenants who had bought their homes could not keep up their payments, and some houses were sold to absentee landlords. Legislation enables a landlord to get rid of a tenant, but what if the landlord himself will not act to get rid of a tenant because he is quite happy to receive the tenant's housing benefit, which comes straight to him? That leads to someone in my constituency having what he calls his extended family calling at all hours of the day and night, knocking on the door and asking for drugs. The neighbours are afraid to give evidence, and the police and the local authority are not able to do anything to eject the tenant. Charges could be pressed—the police are quite happy to do so—but the tenant cannot be got rid of because the absentee landlord refuses to act.

I have written to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and to the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) about the matter, but I have been very disappointed with the replies that I have received. Whatever we think of private property in this instance, landlords who are prepared to keep such tenants should be deprived of their property.

I deal now with clause 33, which I regard as extremely important. The House has the opportunity to get rid of capital punishment for all civil criminal offences, if that is not a contradiction in terms. I am especially happy that clause 33 will amend, among others,

"(a) section II of the Crown of Ireland Act 1542 (occasioning disturbance) . . .

(b) section XII of the Act of Supremacy (Ireland) 1560 (penalties for maintaining or defending foreign authority);

(c) section 3 of the Treason Act 1702 (endeavouring to hinder the succession to the Crown etc. punishable as high treason);

(d) section I of the Treason Act (Ireland) 1703 (which makes corresponding provision)".

I regard those amendments as a bonus to the balanced constitutional accommodation that we are seeking at the talks in Stormont, although if the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) knew about it, he would probably dive into the Thames following the tricolours.

Clause 33 is important because it means, or I hope it means, that we are now in a position to sign protocol 6 of the European convention. Paragraph 4.13 of the White Paper relating to the Human Rights Bill states that signing it would

"make it impossible for a United Kingdom Parliament to re-introduce the death penalty for murder, short of denouncing the European Convention. The view taken so far is that the issue is not one of basic constitutional principle but is a matter of judgement and conscience to be decided by Members of Parliament as they see fit. For these reasons, we do not propose to ratify Protocol 6 at present."

I stress the words "as they see fit". If both Houses of Parliament agree to the clause, will my hon. Friend the Minister of State say that we can now ratify protocol 6? If we accept clause 33, the House of Commons will have said that it wants an end to capital punishment.

When he winds up, I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to say that the Government will accept the will of the House and, more important, that we can sign protocol 6. Or will he say that we are going to have to wait for a Government amendment to the Human Rights Bill? I do not mind which answer he gives, but if the House has decided that we should sign protocol 6 and remove the obscenity of capital punishment from our system in relation to ordinary criminal law, I hope that he can persuade my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to do the same for military offences.

Finally, I join my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) in congratulating our noble Friends in another place and in the Council of Europe who have argued for the abolition of capital punishment, but I especially congratulate Lord Archer of Sandwell, a former distinguished Member of this House. He has a history of fighting for civil and human rights throughout the world, but especially in this country and in Northern Ireland. I can think of no greater epitaph than that he had carried the appropriate amendment through the House of Lords and had seen it passed by the House of Commons, and thus ensured that the death penalty disappeared.

7.57 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). Although we represent different political parties, we share many values. Indeed, we have debated many of these matters in Hull.

It is terribly important that the House builds on the consensus that appears to be developing. I suspect that the two major political parties are now closer together on law and order issues than at any time in the past 20 years. I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said. Indeed, I thought that the latter part of his speech was the best that I had ever heard him make in this place. However, given his authority and experience, it does not encourage rational debate when he maintains that all the problems are down to Thatcherite yob culture. I wish that life were so simple, but it is not. If the problems are entirely the fault of the Conservative Government and especially of my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher, why are they so prevalent throughout all western nations? We have to try to tackle the problems together: coming out with simplistic statements does not help at all.

In many ways, I do blame the Conservative Government because, like most Governments, they followed legal fashion. In the late 1980s, when I was parliamentary private secretary to Lord Waddington at the Home Office, distinguished judges were telling the Home Secretary that we were sending far too many people to prison, and that every piece of research showed that prison did not solve anything. Lord Waddington and my boss at the time, now Lord Patten, took the judges' advice and started to make it more difficult for judges to send people to prison. That was the legal fashion at the time and, as a result, my own Government were guilty of making a major mistake, although their action was applauded by legal opinion and all other political parties at the time.

The nation owes a debt of gratitude to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) for the way in which he reversed the results of that fashionable legal opinion. He has been castigated by the great and the good of the legal establishment ever since and his name is mud with many people, but now, not only the Conservative party, as one would expect, but both the main political parties accept much of what he did. Whatever Labour Members think, much of the groundwork for the Bill was laid in the Conservative manifesto. We have to work together.

Recent Home Office research clearly shows what we all know, which is that

"the key factors relating to criminality are being male; being brought up by a criminal parent or parents; living in a family with multiple problems; experiencing poor parenting and lack of supervision at school; playing truant; associating with delinquent friends; and having brothers and sisters who offend."

The single most important influence on a child's development is that of the family. We talk too glibly about "the family" and, if we want to be politically correct, we say that all families are equal. But not all families are equal. The same Home Office research states:

"For both males and females, those who lived with both natural parents were the least likely ever to start to offend . . . The difference in offending rates between those brought up by two natural parents was statistically significant for both males and females."

Those quotes are from "Young People and Crime" by Bowling and Graham, which was published in 1995.

Twenty per cent. of all recorded crime is committed by juveniles, so anything that the Bill does to solve that problem should be welcomed; but I fear that the Bill only scratches the surface. Why are all western countries facing similar problems? It is because we have created a sort of yob culture, not through what some Minister did or did not do five or 10 years ago, but through a general decline in religion, ethics and morality. Parliament is absolutely powerless against those trends, but we have to have the courage at least to make a start. It did not help when the previous Parliament, when my own party was in office, made divorce even easier than it had been previously, despite the fact that some of my colleagues and I fought that Bill line by line.

However, we have to start somewhere, so I welcome parenting orders and anti-social behaviour orders, even though, like my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), I believe that they will be bureaucratic and difficult to implement. In its briefing, the Law Society acknowledges that anti-social behaviour is a serious problem in some areas, but it makes a good point when it says:

"A range of civil proceedings already exist which should adequately deal with these neighbourhood problems. If they are not used, it is because the 'victim' is not helped to make use of the civil system and may not be eligible for legal aid. Local authority or police solicitors should be responsible, as is proposed for these new provisions in this paper".

There is absolutely no point in the Government introducing a new criminal justice Bill or disorder Bill every year, while not providing adequate resources through legal aid to implement what is already on the statute book.

Many people who, like me, have practical experience in the criminal courts of this country know that magistrates and judges, especially after the work of the past five years, have adequate powers to deal with the problem; what they do not have are the necessary resources. The way to deal with young offenders is not through bureaucratic parenting orders, but through having more secure places available to magistrates. Magistrates are sick and tired of people like us—parliamentarians—lecturing them when they have the powers, but when every time they want to lock up a young thug who is terrorising a local estate there is no secure place available.

Such problems are not confined to typical inner-city areas, like Hull, North or other Labour areas. Some people think that Gainsborough is a pleasant rural constituency in Lincolnshire, but I can take hon. Members to the Park Springs estate where there is a road which is devastated, with a whole row of houses boarded up, and where people are terrorised. The most powerful part of the speech made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South came when he quoted the case of the gentleman who had made the mistake of buying his council house, but who could not sell it and whose life was made a misery. Our people who live in estates are fed up. We must have courage: we must not continue to pretend that providing new legislation every year and having orders here and extra powers there will solve the problem; we have to give the resources to police and magistrates.

We cannot solve the problem by pretending that slick improvements in the administration of justice will achieve anything, but we make that mistake again and again. We should be proud of our legal system; we should be recognise the fact that not everyone who comes before the courts is guilty and that people must have a fair trial. Listen to what the Bar Council says:

"Even where a defendant admits his involvement in a particular offence, there may be a substantial amount of negotiation prior to entering a guilty plea and, even without negotiation, it is rare that all the facts of the case as set out in the prosecution statements are accepted. In mitigation, facts may be presented to the Court which run contrary to the prosecution case and decisions concerning the acceptability or otherwise of what is advanced in mitigation must be made on the spot by the CPS lawyer in court. Without a lawyer present, there would be a risk of further hearings or that the defendant will be sentenced on an unduly lenient basis."

Those are people who actually practise law and who know what they are talking about, but we are going to allow non-lawyers to take important decisions.

Let us not fool ourselves that any slick solution proposed in the Bill will solve the problem—it will not. Crime has been rising inexorably because of a breakdown

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

of moral values in society. The only way to deal with that breakdown is to give adequate resources to our courts and to the police.

8.7 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), used the words "we believe" 24 times in his speech—it was more of a confession than a speech. We in the Labour party also believe: we believe in the good sense of the electorate in returning a Labour Government last May. One of the principal reasons why so many Conservative Members lost their seats in the general election was the Conservative Government's appalling record on crime and disorder.

I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on his outstanding record over the past 11 months. He is a Home Secretary who is committed to bringing crime under control; he is the Home Secretary who abolished the primary purpose rule and who is taking action against illegal immigration advisers; he has introduced several other measures relating to race and immigration; and he established the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. On the issue of crime, he has been tough on hooligans and provided extra support for victims.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) is no longer here. He ridiculed the work that has been done in respect of drugs, but the appointment of the drugs tsar has been one of the most effective actions taken by the Labour Government. As one who served on the Home Affairs Committee when it reported on the problem of crack cocaine and the way in which it has pervaded society in America, I believe that the work of the drugs tsar is extremely important in combating drugs.

I therefore pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and to his excellent ministerial team, one of whom—the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)—is here, for the work that they have done, and pledge my continued support for them in their fight against crime.

My right hon. Friend visited my constituency last June and went to one of my most difficult estates, Northfields. He saw what 18 years of fear and neglect—18 years of the creation of fortress Britain—meant to the people of Northfields. He had the opportunity to have tea with Dolly Juby, one person in an estate racked with crime who feared going out by day—let alone by night—because of the large amount of criminal activity there.

My right hon. Friend also met members of the local tenants' association and re-asserted his commitment and that of the Government to the creation of a crime policy that involves various agencies. The partnership approach is the most important consideration in the Bill—bringing the police, tenants' associations, schools and, indeed, local businesses into the fight against crime.

I never used to support closed circuit television. In fact, like my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who is no longer present, I used to be critical of it, because I thought it affected people's civil liberties. However, it is one of the only means by which we can fight crime on housing estates. Recently, I went to Thurnby lodge in my constituency and met local campaigners Paul Newcombe and Ricky Thomas, who are at the forefront of the campaign launched by local residents in support of greater video surveillance. They believe that it is an effective use of resources. That is why we fully support what the local chief constable, David Wyrko, and Leicestershire constabulary have done in the fight against crime.

I heard the horrific statistics mentioned by many of my colleagues. In fact, there was a 9.5 per cent. drop in recorded crime in Leicestershire between April 1997 and March 1998 because of the effective work done by the local police and the local partnerships that have been created. In October 1997, the safe school initiative was launched and a new initiative—motorcycle watch—has also been created. The Home Secretary's visit to Northfields has been followed up to ensure that time, resources and police person power are used on estates of that type.

I must highlight two more issues. First, I urge the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, whom I recently met to discuss the issue, to try to include in the Bill a provision on hit-and-run drivers. They know that we have a long-standing major campaign in Leicester in support of giving the police greater powers to arrest people whom they suspect of hit-and-run driving. It is odd that there is a loophole in the law that prevents the police from arresting someone whom they suspect of committing that offence.

In 1993, I introduced a Bill to deal with the problem. Initially, the Conservative Government opposed it, but, on the very day the election was called, I received a letter from the then Home Secretary saying that the Government would support the creation of a new offence. At my meeting with the Minister of State, I was pleased to hear that this Government also support the measure. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions also supports it and the Minister for Roads has written to tell me that she supports the creation of such an offence, as has the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department.

We need a new offence to deal with hit-and-run drivers because of the many people who have been killed or injured by them—for example, 84-year-old Bill Carter, who was knocked down and killed as a result of the actions of a hit-and-run driver, which is why his daughter Carmel and his son-in-law have helped to launch our campaign for the legislation to be amended. I hope that the Government will be able to ensure that something is done—if not by amending the legislation, by assuring us that they will introduce legislation in the near future to deal with that gap in the law.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary again—now that he is in his place—on what he is doing on race. He is the first Home Secretary to tackle racial discrimination seriously. I do not know whether this is an unparliamentary term, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but what a silly man the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire is for saying that the Conservative Government did not have an opportunity in 18 years to introduce legislation to combat racial harassment and attacks. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) pointed out, he and others had been urging the previous Government for 18 years to do something about it. Now, we have a Home Secretary and a Government who are prepared to do something.

The statistics are appalling. In 1988, there were 4,383 reported incidents of racial harassment or violence, and between 1995 and 1996, there were 12,222 such incidents. It is estimated that, in 1991, as many as 130,000 racial incidents took place—26,000 involved vandalism and 32,250 assaults. That is why the Government's commitment to ensuring that something is done is absolutely clear.

I must also pay tribute to Sir Herman Ouseley, the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, who has worked hard to ensure that the issue remains on the agenda. Legislation is not enough to change people's attitudes. We have to do a lot more to ensure that our multiracial country shows that it guarantees the rights of minorities and celebrates its cultural diversity. I know that legislation will not change those people who commit racial assaults, but it is an important step along the way and it sends a message from this place that we will not tolerate such action.

To quote my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary:

"There is still discrimination and prejudice and too few opportunities for black and Asian people, too many glass ceilings, too many closed doors".

Also, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, speaking at Brighton last year, said:

"We cannot be a beacon to the world unless the talents of all the people shine through."

Legislation is a way in which we can show the black and Asian community that Parliament wants the talents of all its people to be recognised and that anyone who would prevent that from happening will be dealt with severely.

Finally, the Solicitor-General, closing the debate in another place, said:

"In our view, this is a sensible, wide-ranging Bill. It is ambitious and innovative."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 December 1997; Vol. 584, c.593.]

I am certain that the Bill will enhance this Government's reputation as a Government who are tough on crime and the causes of crime.

8.17 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I, too, must start by congratulating the Home Secretary—my congratulations are perhaps more surprising than some of the others that he has received during the debate—on the intellectual journey that he has taken to arrive at this Bill. In his opening remarks, and more particularly in his article in *The Times* this morning, he described clearly how everything that the Labour party had been saying about law and order for his entire time in politics until the past couple of years had been wrong.

It was brave of the right hon. Gentleman to admit that. I can only wish him joy and success in trying to educate some of the hon. Members on the Benches behind him into cutting themselves off from their previous prejudices. From some of the remarks and noises made from a sedentary position, it was clear that, whereas the Home Secretary may have made a considerable intellectual journey, it has not yet been made by the rest of his party.

I also pay tribute not merely to the contents of the Bill but to its size and timing. The fact that the Home Secretary has produced it in the first Session of this Parliament is a tribute to him—and, more particularly, to his predecessor. The many actions taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) not only did good in themselves, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends pointed out in the debate, but achieved something extremely unusual for any Minister in any Government. It would be unusual enough for a Prime Minister, but it is particularly unusual for any other Minister. Those achievements have transformed the climate of debate in Britain on law and order and the measures appropriate to achieve its objectives.

One of the greatest tributes that could be paid to my right hon. and learned Friend is the fact that one of the Labour Government's flagship Bills is the wide-ranging Crime and Disorder Bill, which contains measures which, only four or five years ago, practically every Labour Member of Parliament would have described as unacceptably authoritarian. Many Conservative Members would have described them as common sense, and they supported the former Home Secretary in the many measures that he introduced, as they support the measures in the Bill that on proposals made by the previous Government and their Home Secretary.

The Home Secretary will be glad to hear that I am about to stop embarrassing him with my congratulations, but, before I do so, I must congratulate him on joining the ranks of the authoritarians, as he would have described them in previous years. That is where his journey has taken him. It has taken him to a more sensible place than that which he and his party occupied for much of the past 20 years.

Before the Bill goes into Committee, it is vital to flag up some of our individual concerns. The Bill's intentions may be good, and many of its measures welcome, but it is clear that, in some areas, the Government have allowed their rhetoric to run away from the practicalities. In particular, the many measures that rely on local authority action require careful consideration by the House this evening and in Committee.

The reliance that the Government propose to put on local authorities in their law enforcement strategy is startling. Local authorities will have to work with the police to apply for anti-social behaviour orders, they will be responsible for crime and disorder strategies, and they will have to set up a local child curfew scheme. Many new responsibilities are being put on local authorities, and, as ever, the essential question is where the money will come from.

We have already had a notably skewed and ungenerous local authority settlement this year, and one assumes that that will continue during the Government's lifetime. The Government are therefore expressing pious hopes that local authorities will be able to contribute to the fight against crime and disorder—we all hope that they will be able to do so—without giving them the tools to do the job properly.

One fears that many local authorities will take their responsibilities seriously, and remove money from other budgets. It would be cruel and counter-productive if local authorities, in their desire to meet those important new responsibilities and to help many of those who live on estates—we have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House of the many problems that exist in certain areas—take the money from the education or social security budgets to put into the crime prevention budget. Unless and until the Government provide the resources

[Mr. Damian Green]

for local authorities to have a proper and effective law enforcement strategy, they are in danger of cruelly deceiving people.

There are also legitimate concerns about the many measures in the Bill to cope with children and young teenagers. One of the more interesting parts of the Home Secretary's article in *The Times* this morning was his point that the Government have moved from listening to pressure groups, and have started listening to real people living in real communities, who have always been much more sensible—that is, much more tough—about law and order than the pressure groups.

It is worth the Home Secretary's while to take note of the various representations I have received from bodies that could not be regarded as wild pressure groups, such as Barnardos and the Children's Society, who say that the compulsory attendance part of a parental responsibility order, under duress and threat of a fine, is likely to exacerbate tension between parent and child, and, in some instances, result in family breakdown and admissions to care. Clearly no one would want that, but if responsible bodies such as Barnardos see it as a possibility, I hope that the Home Secretary will take it seriously.

There are obviously gaps in the Bill. It is still not clear whether 10 and 11-year-olds might be detained alongside rather older teenagers. That would clearly be an extreme threat to their welfare, and would, I suspect, be counter-productive in the long run. I hope that the Minister can guarantee that that will not happen.

The Government are also failing to deliver on their pledge to remove 15 and 16-year-olds from adult gaols. That was a practice which the Prime Minister described as a scandal when he was shadow Home Secretary. I assume that he has not changed his view, so I hope that the Home Secretary will be able to deal with that fairly quickly.

The principal danger that the Government will have to address is that the Bill has been over-hyped and will raise expectations too high. I hope that the Minister will deal with how the Bill's success can be measured. Labour Members have made many rather cheap and simplistic points about the failure of the previous Government's law and order policy. I simply point out that, for some years now, there have been consistent falls in the crime rate, and that is the best way of measuring the success of a law and order policy.

Will the Bill's success be measured by falling crime rates, falling juvenile crime rates or falling prison numbers? I and, I am sure, the House, will be grateful if this evening we can be given some clear idea of objective measures by which the Bill's success can be measured.

The Home Secretary has made a long journey in the right direction. I hope that the measures he introduces as a result will be successful. I have doubts about some of them, and I should like to know how he will measure the success of his law and order strategy.

8.27 pm

Mrs. Anne McGuire (Stirling): Unlike the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I welcome the opportunity to have Scottish legislation piggy-backed through on the Bill. It would have been faintly bizarre and somewhat bewildering for the Scottish people if some of those generic issues relating to anti-social behaviour and sex offending had not been considered in this way when there is such pressure on legislative time.

Given the time restraints, I want to address particularly clauses 18 and 19, which deal with the generic issues of anti-social behaviour and sex offending orders.

Stirling, in its own time, has gained a certain notoriety in all sorts of ways, but, in January 1997, the douce town hit the media images across the United Kingdom when we saw, perhaps in many respects for the first time, a vigilante mob in an area of the town seeking to expel a recently released paedophile.

The sight was not edifying. The forces of law and order seemed almost unsure of their role, and the local authority was wrestling with two conflicting and almost self-exclusive roles. As a social services agency, it had a duty of care to the released prisoner, and, as a housing department, it had a duty to provide accommodation for someone who had just been released from prison. Yet, at the same time, it was the statutory guardian of the children in the community in terms of their safety, and was also, obviously, the education authority, responsible for the schools which surrounded the area into which that person had moved.

The paedophile was removed from that bed-and-breakfast accommodation and taken to another hostel, only to be traced in that community. Women from the first area were joined by mothers in the second area. Having spoken to those parents later, I can tell the House that they were almost embarrassed by their actions, but not one has expressed regret to me about the activity in which they had to be involved. As parents, they saw that their primary duty was to protect their children, and they did not see any other route by which they could do that.

One of the most welcoming features of the Bill is that it will provide an alternative route to guarantee public safety. My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the way in which he has confronted vigilante mob rule over recent days. We have to come up with a system of managing the freedom of the sex offender or of deciding whether that sex offender should be released. Parents, children and communities across the country need to feel safe. I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments, because, if we do not challenge the vigilante approach, there is a grave danger of driving sex offenders underground, which would be an even greater danger for communities.

That is why I particularly welcome the extension of supervision orders within the Scottish element of the Bill where there is a serious perceived threat to the community or to public safety. I reckon that parents, knowing that the extensions exist and that there are severe penalties for breach of them, will feel some comfort.

I give a word of warning to the House. We must remember that the majority of sex offenders are not from outside the network of family or friends. More often that not, children know the sex offender, and they may be from within the family circle. Many complex relationships must be addressed.

I welcome the Scottish Office initiative to establish an expert panel under the chairmanship of Lady Cosgrove, who is the only female High Court judge in Scottish legal

circles. I trust that that expert panel will take forward some of the recommendations of the recent Skinner investigation.

The other aspect that I want to mention introduces an element of poetic irony. One of the leaders of the vigilante group against the paedophile was hounded out of her home by local people only a few months later. They were fed up with her family's well-documented anti-social behaviour. She learned from bitter experience that, once one is branded as anti-social, as a paedophile or as somebody who is not acceptable within a community, it is incredibly difficult to be rehoused. One ends up being shunted around the local authority system.

I hope that we look in Committee at ways in which local authorities work collectively to solve those strategic problems. I am pleased that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has already started on that route.

Like most hon. Members, I have seen my fair share of serious distress, with people coming to my surgery detailing appalling anti-social behaviour. Some might call it a clash of life styles, but that is too comfortable a term. I do not know why people need to play loud music in the middle of the night or to hoover at 4 am. I find it bizarre that people hammer nails into the wall at 6 am in order to put up pictures. That does not take account of the loud, violent behaviour, foul language and consistent intimidatory behaviour that some people have to put up with.

The Law Society of Scotland briefed Scottish Members of Parliament today on some of the clauses dealing with anti-social behaviour. It said that, in its eyes, the breach of the peace element of Scottish law was sufficient to deal with some of the issues.

With the greatest respect to my legal friends in the Law Society, that view is out of touch with reality. Councils often cannot get the necessary action under the breach of the peace element. It is a one-off incident approach, and a cumbersome mechanism. If anybody wants to know how it operates, they should ask the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. McLeish) because he was a witness in a lengthy and dreadful court case dealing with an anti-social family.

I am talking about a sustained pattern of anti-social behaviour. My council area has, on average, 40 active cases in which a portfolio of evidence has been gathered and diaries kept. I am sure that everybody here has seen the diaries that people are asked to keep.

In those cases, a meticulous gallery of information has been gathered, and mediation and conciliation have been tried to an infinite extent. In spite of that, the local authority has managed to gain only five court judgments on anti-social behaviour over the past two years. That does not give confidence to those on the receiving end. The current system in Scotland is not working to deal with anti-social behaviour. People in my communities in Stirling have no confidence in it, because it does not deliver for the good resident.

Perhaps the last word in my contribution should go to somebody on the receiving end of all this. A woman from Dunblane came to see me, and said:

"Our nerves are raw because of the continued stress of all the noise, loss of sleep and frustration of complaining endlessly and little being done. We feel tension every time we turn into our street to come home . . . I have cried daily . . . everything seems so futile and so very unfair. The bad language is awful . . . these people have made me a prisoner."

I want to liberate that sort of prisoner. This Bill is a way of starting that process, and I wish it a good wind.

8.36 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I will try to be brief to allow as many hon. Members as possible to contribute.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) finished on a point that is relevant to most of us from our surgeries and that is the problem of anti-social neighbours and trying to get across to people who are not living in such circumstances how devastating it is to have one's family home destroyed by the activities of a neighbour. Until something is done about it, it is a life sentence for the people living in those conditions. Obviously, both sides of the House welcome the fact that the Bill attempts to tackle those issues.

The Bill must not be oversold, and people must not be given a false sense of a quick solution, in the belief that a simple law here or there will change things. I have the same briefing from the Law Society of Scotland as the hon. Member for Stirling, and I believe that we may need to look at the relevant clause to see whether it makes improvements.

There is a recognition that there are sitting on the statute book laws that, if properly used, could help people in those situations. We must ensure that the agencies involved—the police, the council and everyone else—are making full use of the resources already available to them, and that we are not just bolting on an extra law in the hope that it will deal with the problem. Clearly, resources are part of the problem and the solution.

The fear of crime has already been mentioned; we must try to deal with those fears. We must recognise that politicians play a key role in creating fear of crime—in our desire to outbid one another in sensationalism, we can overstress the incidence and nature of crime, so that there is greater fear than the statistics warrant.

It could be argued that, by an empirical measure, bobbies on the beat do not effectively fight crime, but they may be an extremely effective way in which to tackle the fear of crime. The fear of crime among elderly people, in particular, is easily fuelled, and if they feel able to leave their houses because they see bobbies on the beat, the money is well spent—it liberates people and gives them more control over their lives.

In my constituency, the police in the south division of Grampian have put more bobbies on the beat as an experiment, which has been extremely well received—the pilot studies in Banchory are now spreading throughout the constituency.

As we have sat through so many debates on the Government of Scotland Bill, I say to the hon. Member for Stirling that almost all these matters will be dealt with by a Scottish Parliament. I find it strange that she does not believe that the Bill needs true scrutiny by Scottish Members holding Scottish Ministers to account.

Shelter raised the issue of how clause 23 would work in practice—it may be drawn far too widely, and could be used to evict people who are sent to prison for committing crimes that do not affect their neighbours. That contradicts

[Sir Robert Smith]

Scottish Office guidelines, which suggest that local authorities should do all that they can to ensure that prisoners are not made homeless—the Government are telling local authorities not to make prisoners homeless, but they are also promoting a measure that could make prisoners homeless without tackling the core issue of violent and drug-related crimes. I hope that the Government will consider constructively amendments to that clause.

As the Government have such a large majority, there is a danger that constructive amendments will not be considered as openly as possible—I hope that that will not be the case. There is also a danger that we may believe that because an issue is important, the mere fact that it is covered by the Bill will deal with it; that is not necessarily so.

We also need to consider whether the Bill has been properly drafted in terms of Scottish law. Clause 20, for example, gives powers to a chief constable, but I wonder whether the powers should rather be granted to the procurator fiscal. Clause 30 deals with race crimes and racial harassment, and, in Scotland, we may want that to be defined differently, so that it takes into account religious motivation. Again, I hope that the Government will view debates on these matters in Committee constructively.

I see from the notes on the financial effects of the Bill that clauses 81 to 87 will be introduced as pilot schemes. That highlights the important question of resources. If we are to help people to cope constructively with their drug behaviour, we must fund the help that we want to give.

As there is a good deal of consensus on the Bill among hon. Members, I hope that, in Committee, we shall listen to the bodies from outside the House that lobby us, to ensure that the law is effectively drafted and tightly drawn, and achieves what was intended. There is a danger that, after happily passing laws because we agree with the motives behind them, we will come to regret that either they do not deliver or that they deliver consequences other than the ones that were intended—we will regret not listening to the warnings that came from outside the House. I hope that, in Committee, all hon. Members will carefully read and take on board the briefing that we receive—badly drafted laws fail to serve the victims or the wider society that they are meant to help.

8.42 pm

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I am sure that all hon. Members agree that crime and disorder not only cause fear and misery, but have a devastating effect on individuals, families and whole communities. A criminal may commit an offence in a split second, but the act will often have long-lasting and dramatic repercussions, sometimes affecting the victims and their families for the rest of their lives. It is crucial that crime and disorder policies should have the desired effect of enabling law-abiding citizens to live peacefully and harmoniously without unnecessary interference from others.

The Government must be congratulated on the urgency with which they have introduced the Bill—within a year of the general election—in an attempt to tackle the appalling problems of crime, disorder and lawlessness that, in truth, were inherited from the previous Administration.

The Bill is innovative, and contains some imaginative and creative thinking. It will tackle crime head on—such a no-nonsense approach has been a long time coming. We must send out a signal to the criminal perpetrators of so much misery that they and the illegal activity that the country has become familiar with—through compulsion rather than choice—will no longer be tolerated.

The Bill is wide ranging, but I intend to concentrate on three main areas. First, there is the relationship with local authorities. I am pleased that the Government have recognised the major role that local authorities can play in tackling crime and disorder. It is a role which the previous Conservative Government so often brushed aside.

I welcome and applaud the provisions on youth justice, and especially the joint responsibility placed on local authorities and the police to develop and implement local crime-and-disorder strategies in consultation with other agencies. That will enable the community to work together on crime strategies that are adapted to reflect local needs and priorities.

The principle of cross-agency communication has been successfully developed over the past three years in my home town, by the Bolton safer cities project, which has focused on reducing crime, reducing the fear of crime and creating safer cities where economic and community life can flourish.

The result has been extremely encouraging. First, the project's work has helped to break down barriers between the various agencies. In particular, Bolton safer cities tackled and confronted the age-old misconceptions that tackling crime is the responsibility of the police and that looking after young people is the responsibility of social services. Instead, the project has helped to reinforce the idea that the issues are often intertwined and that a collective approach can be much more effective in tackling criminal activity.

One of Bolton safer cities' many initiatives is the partnership scheme, which was targeted in a part of my constituency where recorded crime was the highest in Bolton. Public opinion was that crime was the accepted norm. The successful introduction of the partnership scheme involved housing, leisure, homewatch, the police, the youth service, the probation service and, most important, the community as a whole. As a result, the crime rate in the targeted areas has fallen and public confidence has risen. There has been an improvement in quality of life and the initiative has given residents real sense of belonging.

Most important, the cross-agency approach has helped to achieve a general reduction in crime in the Bolton safer cities areas, which has not been reflected elsewhere in Bolton. For example, in 1996-97, Bolton overall experienced an 11 per cent. reduction in crime compared to 1994. However, in the safer cities target areas there was a 26 per cent. reduction. There was a 5 per cent. reduction in burglaries throughout Bolton, but in the safer city target areas we enjoyed a 41 per cent. reduction.

Those figures clearly demonstrate, at least in Bolton, that a successful partnership between the police and the local authority can greatly increase the chances of winning the battle against crime.

The measures to which I have referred should all greatly improve the present system and help to steer young people away from a life of crime. Such a life undermines their individual welfare and denies them the

opportunity of developing into contributing members of society. Bolton safer cities has discovered through its various projects that a multi-agency approach can help to curtail the deviant behaviour of young offenders and help also to stop them drifting and then collapsing into a life of crime.

The Bolton safer cities project included an initiative called "Breaking the Chain", which focused on involving young people in positive play activities. It was designed to break the chain when children become involved in anti-social behaviour, which can lead to crime, including vandalism, as they grow older. It has been recognised for generations that idle hands create mischief, and that saying is as true today as it ever was.

The Bill, coupled with the Government's new deal for the long-term and young unemployed, is a brave and important attempt to break the mould, and will help to remedy the evil that enforced idleness and criminality inevitably bring. It will help to restore essential public confidence in the agencies that face the daunting task of tackling crime and disorder. Until now, the agencies received a rough deal from all concerned.

The truth is that the police have been fighting a losing battle in recent years, and it is vital that this country realises that crime, particularly youth crime, is the responsibility of all sections of society. Public confidence is essential if we are to have any hope of achieving mutual responsibility in the struggle against crime.

Anti-social behaviour causes distress and abject misery to innocent, law-abiding citizens. It can undermine entire communities. At its most extreme, it can force people out of their homes. Sometimes, as we all know, it can have even more tragic consequences. The anti-social behaviour order will give local authorities and the police the power to restrict the behaviour of those who engage in intimidating and threatening behaviour, and thereby improve the lives of those who are subject to such abhorrent abuse. We must send out a loud and clear message that the activities of those who take a sadistic delight in making the lives of others a misery will no longer be tolerated by British society, and certainly not by the present Government.

On reparation orders, clause 63 contains an innovative approach to making individuals accountable for their actions, which I particularly welcome, as it helps to demonstrate to young offenders the harm that they have caused to their victims and to communities, and provides them with the opportunity to make amends and rejoin law-abiding society. It is hoped that, in the years ahead, this will enable them to become responsible young adults again, and contribute effectively to community life.

The Bill is all about the community, because there is still such a thing. Indeed, the vast majority of people value the community. They deserve a quality community and a quality of life, and we must not allow that to be destroyed by a mindless minority. The Bill is the first step towards ensuring that we will tolerate nothing less.

8.52 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I shall be brief, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

I, too, commend the Government on many of the measures in the Bill, which builds on measures introduced under the previous Government; but they are important and welcome none the less. The measures to accelerate justice, to crack down on youth crime and tackle anti-social behaviour are welcome, and deserve the all-party report that they have received. I wish to make five brief points.

First, as I mentioned earlier, I am concerned about clause 53, which is difficult to reconcile with the Government's commitment to be tough on crime.

Secondly, the Minister would be well advised not to follow the advice of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who urged him to use clause 33 as a reason for signing up to article 6 of the European convention on human rights. That would not be right. The Government, in their White Paper, were right to say that the death penalty—whatever our views on it—will remain a matter for the conscience of Members of Parliament, and this Parliament or any other should not seek to bind its successor and override the views of future Members of Parliament.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) dealt with resources, and, while I agree with the congratulations expressed by many Conservative Members on the activities of the previous Home Secretary, it is worth noting that he used a two-pronged approach. One was legislation—the Bill takes forward the sort of ideas that he was in the course of introducing. The other was persuading the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), in each of his last three Budgets, to devote additional resources, above and beyond planned public expenditure, to the police—accorded equal priority with education and health. The current Chancellor has said that education and health alone are his priorities for public expenditure above and beyond previous PES lines. I hope that the Minister will accept our support for any future negotiations that he and his colleagues embark on with the Treasury on the proposition that the police should be given equal public expenditure priority with education and health.

Fourthly, it is worth noting that clause 34, intended by the Government to be the heart of the Bill, lays the important—but sole—duty on the youth justice system to prevent youth crime. I am not a lawyer, unlike many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but, earlier this week, I discussed the Bill with a distinguished and successful defence lawyer, who told me he believed that clause 34, if enacted, would enable a canny defence lawyer to persuade a magistrate or judge that a juvenile offender who might otherwise be sentenced to detention should not be so sentenced. He might use the argument, advanced not least by Liberal Democrat Members, that incarceration could lead to exposure to other criminals and hence to more crime in the longer term.

As Ministers and Conservative Front Benchers alike now accept that there are circumstances in which prison works, I hope that the Government will think again about clause 34 and consider the need to introduce an element of punishment and retribution in addition to the duty to prevent youth crime. That would ensure that the Government's intention behind the clause—tougher sentences—was not abused or misinterpreted.

Fifthly, I hope, at this sensitive time for Northern Ireland, that the Minister will put on record the fact that he does not accept the arguments of those who say that there are political prisoners in Northern Ireland who

[Mr. Tim Collins]

should be released as part of any peace settlement. I hope that he will make it clear that no one is incarcerated in any part of the United Kingdom for his political views. People are incarcerated solely for having been convicted of criminal activity. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) claimed this afternoon at Northern Ireland questions that there were indeed political prisoners in Northern Ireland—an outrageous misinterpretation of the truth. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to correct it at the end of this debate.

8.57 pm

Mrs. Fiona Jones (Newark): I am pleased to have been called in the debate, because crime and its causes—especially youth crime—are of great interest to me. We all recognise that crime and general disorder are a major blight on the lives of many people living in ordinary housing estates—estates undermined by high crime levels.

Last year in my constituency, youngsters from a couple of families caused havoc with their unruly and aggressive behaviour—they made people's lives on their estate a misery. Subsequently, they attracted other badly behaved children, and crime and vandalism in the area escalated out of control. I am glad to say that the problem has largely been resolved now, by the willingness of a number of agencies and the local authority to work together. The Bill advocates partnership with local authorities; youth offender teams will enable the police to work with social services and teachers to tackle youth crime and its causes.

Although the problems on the one estate I have mentioned have improved, the same is not true of other areas in Newark. Like many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I receive letters every day about graffiti, about plants being kicked over and about garden ornaments being broken. Many would describe such incidents as petty crime, but they are often a source of great distress to the unfortunate recipients.

Youth crime has got out of control, and ordinary people all over the country have suffered. This is by no means an urban issue. Anti-social behaviour is experienced in even the most rural areas. The Bill will tackle the problems that we face with a sense of urgency and with a determination to be effective.

8.59 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I shall endeavour to be as brief as my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), but I cannot promise to be as succinct.

The Bill has been welcomed by both sides of the House. I hope that I will not spoil the fun of the party by suggesting that one or two matters should be considered a little more carefully before we give the Bill the welcome that many people think it deserves.

Clause 31 abolishes the presumption that a child aged 10 or over is incapable of committing an offence. I wish that we had done that in our time in government. I am glad that this part of the criminal law, which was introduced in the middle ages for good, sensible and humane reasons, is now to go.

It is interesting that clause 32 allows a court to draw an inference from the silence of a child. The chances are that a child will be in court only if accompanied by a lawyer. A child's silence at trial should not be treated in the same way as the silence of an adult. I hope that the Government will think carefully before exposing children, no matter how naughty or criminal they may have been, to such a risk.

Much fun has been poked at the ancient language of some of the mediaeval and 18th century Acts of Parliament that deal with treason. I make no secret of my implacable opposition to the death penalty for murder. However, I believe that we should not lightly abolish the death penalty for treason or offences against the state, especially during time of war. I say that in the context of the ordinary criminal law, not military law.

I shall concentrate on clause 2, which deals with anti-social behaviour orders. I hope that I shall not be misunderstood if I say that that has a Soviet ring about it. I fully understand the points made by the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) in her powerful and moving speech. Her experience is entirely different from mine. I hope that she will accept that my remarks are disinterested and dispassionate, and are not designed to devalue or undermine her case. The crime figures for the last four weeks in her constituency reflect the crime figures for the last 10 years in mine. The gulf between us is not just political, but based on our different experiences.

The Home Secretary said that this is a substantial Bill. In my view, it is far too big and cumbersome. The Bill is intended to create a safer and more peaceful country. We all agree with that. He also wants to modernise the criminal justice system. There is nothing wrong with that. However, we should be a little more careful about how we go about that before we reach any hard and fast conclusions. I am suspicious of this all-party cosiness. Unless ideas are tested by argument, bad laws can slip through. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), who sits as a recorder, sees [redacted] consequences of criminal justice legislation. I hope that a little more rigour will be used as the Bill progresses through Committee; otherwise, measures will slip through on a tide of good will, which, although well-intentioned, may have adverse consequences for our law-abiding constituents.

Clause 2 is a dangerous mix of the criminal and the civil law. It gives the police or local authorities a power to apply to a court for the benefit, predominantly but not necessarily, of public housing tenants. As others have pointed out, there are private housing estates that suffer from such problems. Effectively, however, exclusion orders are being created to deal with people who are behaving in an anti-social way.

We must be careful—this observation is not mine originally; it has been made in another place, not necessarily by members of my party—not to create a system of law that discriminates against eccentric people. I mean people who are loosely described as "a nuisance": people who raise eyebrows. We should be tolerant—I say this in the context of what was said by, for instance, the hon. Member for Salford—of people whose lives are somewhat different from the lives that we would like to lead.

Someone said that it was extraordinary that people should want to hoover at 4 am, or to play loud music all night. We should be careful before we pass legislation that could lead to five years' imprisonment. I am having to conflate my remarks, but I am sure the Minister will

understand the point that I am making. We must bear in mind what is involved in leaping from the granting and the subsequent breaking of an order, to the potential of sending someone to prison for five years when the act that constitutes the basis of the breach of that order, if subject to prosecution under the normal criminal law, would not lead to anything like a five-year prison sentence.

That, in a sense, encapsulates my argument. However, I hope that the Minister will also bear in mind the standard and burden of proof in connection with clause 2(4) and (6). I think that he should be careful about legislating by means of Home Office guidance. In another place, the Solicitor-General said that Home Office guidance would be issued with regard to the shape and type of prohibitions. I am instinctively opposed to criminal legislation by Home Office guidance notes, and I ask the Home Office team to bear that in mind.

Let me make a brief point about clause 2(9). In that subsection, the Government are allowing the prosecutor—the police or the local authority complainant—to become part of the sentencing process. The prohibition period can be reduced to less than two years only with the consent of the two parties involved—one of whom, presumably, is the defendant, while the other must be either the police or the local government organisation cited in clause 2(1)(b).

I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that my time is limited and that I want to enable others to speak. I hope, however, that he will accept that, although my remarks have been brief, my underlying concerns are much more substantial than time has allowed me to demonstrate.

9.7 pm

Mr. Ivan Lewis (Bury, South): Listening to the shadow Home Secretary's speech, I was tempted by the phrase "clutching at straws"—not literally, of course, but there was little of substance in his speech.

It is obvious from today's debate that most hon. Members consider it important that what is said is based on the experiences of people up and down the country. In rural villages, inner cities and leafy suburbs, crime and disorder have become an accepted part of everyday life for too many of our citizens. People leave for work in the morning only to find that their cars have been broken into or, even worse, stolen. They peer through their windows at midnight to find out who is making the noise that has woken their children, only to see a group of 13 and 14-year-olds swigging from cans of lager and bottles of wine. Someone may visit his elderly mother in sheltered accommodation, only to find her in a state of panic and distress after her neighbour has been mugged and badly beaten on her way back from the post office. Someone may find that his teenage son is regularly arriving home late because he is trying to avoid a gang who have mugged him on several occasions. Those are not fanciful scenarios, but real-life experiences in my constituency and many others.

The Bill represents the beginning of a genuine and long-term fight against the acceptance that crime must always disfigure our society. It tackles many of the fundamental questions that are raised day in, day out on our estates, at public meetings and in councillors' and Members' surgeries. Why should I have to tolerate my neighbour's all-night music and constant abuse? Why do parents not know where their children are at night? When I told parents about their children's abuse why did they swear at me and threaten violence? In my constituency recently and most seriously, why did two 15-year-olds get only a caution when they beat my teenage son so badly with a baseball bat that he sustained a fractured jaw and is currently in a psychiatric hospital suffering acute stress and anxiety? Why does everybody pass the buck, and why does no one seem able to do anything?

The Bill ends years of confusion about the role of the youth justice system and youth crime. Welfare and punishment always represented muddled and false choices. That will be replaced by a cohesive approach, the overriding objective of which is the prevention of offending by young people. Parents will no longer be allowed to avoid their responsibility for the well-being and behaviour of their children. In some cases parenting orders will assist families to rebuild relationships and re-establish boundaries. That needs to be part of a much broader agenda to support positive parenting. Too many of our children are growing up in homes in which parents provide neither love nor discipline. In some families that parenting deficit is being passed from generation to generation.

The Government are also right to remove the presumption in law that children between the ages of 10 and 14 are incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong. Child curfews were scoffed at by the great and the good when they were first mooted by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Such people should live in neighbourhoods such as Polefield in my constituency where elderly people are terrorised by young children late into the night. Can anybody justify a young child being out unsupervised after 7 o'clock at night, let alone 9 o'clock?

Ending the farce of repeat cautions and prolonged periods from arrest to sentencing for juveniles will also be widely welcomed. Not only will that ensure enhanced protection for the community, but will allow the earliest possible intervention with the young person to prevent him drifting irreversibly into a life of crime, misery and ultimate social exclusion.

Neighbourhood nuisance reflects the undermining of shared values and a sense of community which pervaded the Tory years. People's quality of life can be shattered by abusive and socially unacceptable behaviour by one person or by a small group. Overnight, people's peaceful home environment can be turned into a living nightmare causing stress, anxiety and, until the publication of the Bill, a sense of powerlessness.

The new anti-social behaviour orders will give local authorities and the police the power to act in defence of decent, law-abiding citizens. The Bill's toughening of racial violence and harassment laws will send a clear message to those who operate the criminal justice system and to every citizen. Racism cannot be tolerated in a civilised society. It is a scar on our democracy, and we are determined to root it out in every area of British life. There must be no excuses for a criminal justice system that has failed to protect members of ethnic minority communities from the racists and fascists who continue to peddle their filth in today's Britain.

The Bill is the first piece in the jigsaw of a strategy to combat crime and disorder. It draws a line under the Tory years, when tough and empty rhetoric that was designed to secure a cheap tabloid headline was the substitute for

[Mr. Ivan Lewis]

effective action. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary speaks rationally about practical solutions and he is on the side of the victim. A partnership at local level has been enshrined in law and includes statutory and voluntary agencies who are required to produce, implement and monitor a community safety strategy. We have social and economic policies to tackle poor education, inadequate parenting skills, youth unemployment and the menace of drugs.

The Government are committed to an overall philosophy that stresses the importance of society and community. We want a Britain in which individuals have not only rights but a responsibility to behave in a civilised way towards their fellow citizens. Tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime may be a slogan, but it is the only honest and effective way to minimise future crime and disorder. The Bill is the beginning of new Labour's crusade to reclaim Britain from the criminal and the thug and return it to decent law-abiding citizens. I hope that the House will give it the support that it deserves.

9.13 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I have been instructed to be extremely brief. The statistics that were released yesterday are welcome, and I congratulate the Home Secretary and the chief constable of Hampshire on their role in that splendid achievement. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) said, it is also proper to congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on his role in that achievement. Our constituents' experience of crime will be determined by their perceptions rather than by statistics. Perception, of course, will be determined by their experiences and those of their friends.

Speaking of experience, as I cycled home from this place last night at about a quarter to 11, I came across four youths smashing up a telephone box. I gave chase and cornered one of them. I am glad to say that I assisted the police in securing the arrest of one of the offenders.

Between Notting Hill Gate and Wormwood Scrubs, that is not an unremarkable occurrence. The unfortunate fact, however, is that that experience is common throughout constituencies throughout this land. Only last week, the Bournemouth *Evening Echo* reported on the rowdy activities of 60 youths in Ringwood. In New Milton, we have a persistent problem of vandalism in Station road. Plants are being ripped up in the recreation ground.

I have had letters from constituents complaining about the agony that they have suffered over two years as a result of a stalker, and then the fellow gets off with nothing more than a suspended sentence. I have complaints from Pennington, of all places, of rowdiness in Ramley road. In January, in the New Forest village of Burley, I came across six drunken youths urinating in a street and attempting a break-in and entry.

This is characteristic of a society that is deeply disordered. I accept much of what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said about that society, but I reject almost entirely his diagnosis of the causes. Those causes go back to the disastrous decade of the 1960s, when society lost confidence in its values and lowered its guard—its immune system, if you like—giving rise to all sorts of cancers.

Like many of its predecessors, this Bill will not be able to deal with many of those causes. That will require greater consensus than currently exists, although I am confident that that consensus will exist one day, as indeed I am confident that the gates of hell cannot prevail against us. However, the Bill is welcome in many respects and will do much. I have complaints from lobby groups about its impact on individual liberty, but this is a time when we should give greater consideration to expediency than to liberty.

My fundamental objection to the Bill is with respect to clause 33. It strikes me as being of little practical value and therefore it would perhaps be a good thing if the Committee were to remove it.

9.16 pm

Mr. Stephen Twigg (Enfield, Southgate): I am delighted to have the opportunity to make a brief contribution in this debate.

There is no doubt from the contributions so far that there is consensus in the House that our justice system in general and our youth justice system in particular are ripe for reform. I represent a constituency that would perhaps be stereotyped as leafy and suburban, but in some parts there is a real challenge of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. The Bill provides crucial extra powers to enable us to tackle those challenges.

In particular, the new statutory duty on local authorities and the police has been widely welcomed in Enfield, as it has throughout the country. It builds on existing good local practice. In Enfield, we have an excellent multi-agency approach. In the area of my constituency where we have particular problems of anti-social behaviour—the Oakwood ward—the Addison avenue working group already brings together the police, local authority, local secondary school and youth service, and I get involved as the Member of Parliament.

Springing from that, we have the Oakwood focus group of local residents, again meeting the police, local authority and other agencies. Much has come out of that approach: improved conduct between the police and residents, better co-ordination between the police and local authority, and greater confidence for victims to come forward and to report crimes.

Labour Members are talking about tackling not only crime, but the causes of crime. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to take part in the opening of a new football and basketball pitch in the heart of the Oakwood ward. The idea for the pitch came from the young people themselves, who secured funding from the London borough of Enfield and from the London Marathon Charitable Trust. It is an example of being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Nothing can excuse youth crime or anti-social behaviour, but providing improved facilities for our young people will divert many of them to more positive activities. That is an inherent part of any successful anti-crime strategy.

The ugliest feature of the youth crime that I have witnessed is the sustained harassment of families from ethnic minorities. The new offences of racial harassment and racial violence are long overdue. In the past year, an elderly Jewish couple in the Oakwood area of my constituency have had a star of David daubed on their front door in the middle of the night. An Asian-run corner shop faces daily harassment, including bricks through the

windows. A nearby Asian family have had eggs thrown at their windows. The perpetrators were found only when the family rigged up an amateur video camera and caught them on film.

That has been going on for years in the Oakwood area, but many of the families have felt isolated, because their concerns have not been taken seriously by the authorities. That has started to change with the multi-agency approach that I have outlined and the excellent work of the Enfield racial incidents action group. Awareness is increasing among local people, the council and the police. Practical solutions are being delivered: pinhole cameras to catch offenders; the prosecution of offenders; and the council using its power as a landlord to act against council tenants whose teenagers are responsible for much of what is going on.

The Bill will make our job easier. The new offences of racially motivated crimes—in particular racially aggravated criminal damage—speeding up youth justice and the new anti-social behaviour orders will make a big difference to tackling crime and the causes of crime throughout my constituency. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary visited Oakwood about a month ago and saw what is going on. If we involve the public, we can ensure that the statutory duty makes a real difference to people's lives. I am confident that the people of my constituency expect that from the Bill. I am delighted to support it.

9.21 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): It is clear that there is general agreement about the aims of the Bill, but, although we all share the common objective of reducing crime, in Committee our views may differ on the best way to achieve that. I should like to raise four issues.

First, we welcome the community safety strategies, which may be a way to start tackling the causes of crime, which have received far too little attention. The causes of crime will best be addressed by involving local authorities, which have influence over many factors relating to housing, poverty and services. I have seen some good schemes in areas such as the London borough of Sutton, where the council has got to grips with the issues.

Secondly, we welcome the racial offences provisions. That is a serious matter for thousands of our citizens. The 1996 British crime survey shows not only that there are tens of thousands of incidents a year, but that ethnic minorities score higher than white people on all the measures of fear of crime. That fear is engendered by their daily experience of harassment. We all welcome having a multiracial society. We must deal with the fact that some groups suffer from greater fear of crime.

Thirdly, we welcome the anti-social behaviour orders and the Conservative contribution about their use. Anti-social behaviour does not mean being young, wearing the wrong clothes or being the wrong colour in the wrong part of town. Anti-social behaviour is malicious, intentional behaviour that borders on the criminal. I hope that the orders will be used appropriately. The Government should reflect on their use, to ensure that they are targeted on the right people. We must catch yobs in the net, but we must not sweep up all sorts of other people who are doing ordinary youthful activities. Kids will carry on hanging out on street corners, as they always have done. If they are not committing crime or seriously harassing people, they should not be dragged into the criminal justice system.

Fourthly, we hope that the Government will relent and accept that having a standing advisory council on criminal justice matters is a good way forward. They should not continue to use the system that they inherited from the previous Government—a standing advisory committee of newspaper editorials. We believe that a standing advisory council has a function in the modern system and would bring together people at national level to do the inter-agency working that everyone wants.

I hope that the Government will accept that there is plenty of good practice to build on. I refer specifically to Sheffield magistrates courts, which speed up proceedings on young offenders, and the Thames Valley police experiment on restorative justice, which does much to improve the cautioning system. I hope that such practice will be built into the Government's proposals.

9.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Before the general election, I conducted a crime survey—a straw poll—in Burnt Oak ward, and discovered that, in the preceding three years, a third of my constituents had been victims of crime, and that more than two thirds of them went about their business in fear of crime. I have been a victim of crime myself: having had one car stolen and, recently, another one burnt out, I very much sympathise with those constituents.

Last Friday, I paid a visit to our local youth court. Of the 10 cases that I witnessed in the court, a disposition was possible in only two of them, which were linked, with a conditional discharge. In another case, a defendant faced five charges, which went back as far as August 1997. Although it was his third appearance on the charges, it was not his last, as another adjournment was granted for pre-sentence reports. One case was thrown out—it was the defendant's fourth appearance on it—because the main prosecution did not appear. A couple of defendants did not show up, as they were in other courts facing other charges. Another case, which involved a persistent offender, started more than an hour late, because the defendant was already serving a custodial sentence and Securicor produced him first at the wrong court.

I was assured by the magistrates that that was a typical day—illustrating the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of our current youth justice system.

Much could be done to reduce delays in criminal proceedings, by making simple administration changes and improving co-ordination—on witness availability, for example—between police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts. Delegating functions to single justices and justices' clerks is a good start, but it is necessary to encourage the more hands-on case management approach that is already being practised in the civil justice system. We shall have to impose penalties on lawyers who cause delay by inefficiency and for no good purpose.

The partnership approach heralded in the Bill is already being practised in my area of Barnet, which has excellent links between the council and police. We hope that the health authority will soon be involved in the partnership. However, in building partnerships, we shall have to include, for example, housing associations—which are becoming landlords of ever larger parts of our communities.

[Mr. Andrew Dismore]

Grahame Park—in Colindale, in my constituency—is an example of a large council estate that contains a substantial number of housing association properties, of which the Warden housing association is the landlord. The estate has typical problems of anti-social behaviour, petty vandalism and graffiti. Residents have become frustrated by the association's lack of action, especially after residents made positive suggestions on limiting access to the estate and improving lighting. We have to hear from those residents and involve them. They have already suffered so much, and building on their ideas should form a part of our partnership approach.

In emphasising to me their support for the Bill and its underlying principles, local police and magistrates have also mentioned the need for more local secure accommodation for young offenders, so that family links are maintained.

A senior police officer stressed to me that fast-tracking and tougher action with young offenders will not work effectively if there is nowhere to house those offenders. He illustrated the problem by describing the case of a female juvenile who was in local authority care but continually ran away—at least half a dozen times. She armed herself with screwdrivers, knives and even shards of glass to injure those who tried to stop her. She was a danger to the community, and police officers were trying to apprehend her. However, all they could do was to return her to local authority care, where the cycle would continue.

The Bill's introduction of racially aggravated crimes and tougher sentencing on offences with a racial element has been welcomed by the diverse ethnic communities in Hendon. However, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister, in his reply, will confirm that the definition of racial harassment in clause 25(2) will include the Jewish community. We have already witnessed the fact that anti-Semitism can be a very light sleeper, and several members of Edgware's orthodox Jewish community are concerned about a perceived increase in harassment in the area.

From my discussion with my constituents, all the youth justice agencies, the Crown Prosecution Service, police, the local authority and Middlesex probation service, I have no doubt that the Bill has overwhelming support. The Bill's time has come, and I am happy to give it my full support.

9.29 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): We have had some interesting speeches in the debate, which has been conducted in a constructive spirit. On behalf of the Opposition, I shall seek to respond in a constructive spirit.

I refer straight away to the important points made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about racially aggravated crime, which we have already said we regard as a serious and sensitive subject. His speech struck a slightly discordant note in one respect. I suggest to him that what really matters is what happens in practice. We question how much difference the proposed changes in the Bill will make to what happens in practice.

As the right hon. Member for Gorton and the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) well know, the courts have long regarded a racial element to an offence as an aggravating feature and have accordingly given higher sentences. The Government have decided on their course, and we shall look constructively at their proposals to see how they can be improved. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would join me in asking the Government why less serious offences of assault and public order are being dealt with by the creation of separate offences, but more serious offences, including wounding with intent, are not to be the subject of the specific offence of racial aggravation and will be dealt with as they were under the old system. There are some important questions of detail to be asked on the matter, and I assure the House that we shall ask them constructively.

The right hon. Member for Gorton spoke with some feeling about burglary in his constituency, and mentioned a specific case. The hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) mentioned the problems of burglary in her constituency, in a speech that she delivered with some feeling. I appreciate that every burglary provokes strong feeling. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Lady will join me in satisfaction at the substantial fall in the number of burglaries in the latest crime figures. The number has fallen more sharply than the general fall in recorded crime—by almost 14 per cent. That means tens of thousands fewer victims, which is a good thing.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) made a very authoritative speech. I was pleased to hear him speak about inner-city areas, which we on the Conservative Benches think are important. He also made some important points about the detail of the Bill. He is absolutely right that we must make the best use of technology, to try to streamline our justice system. Other changes, particularly administrative changes, must not be made at the expense of the quality of justice. Although justices' clerks will be better trained and more professional than ever before, as my right hon. and learned Friend rightly said, magistrates should play the dominant role. We should look particularly at what is done by unqualified staff. We need to maintain high standards of quality of justice in our courts, and we shall consider the Bill in some detail in order to see that that is done.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) spoke with feeling about the abolition of the death penalty for treason, which is an important part of the Bill. We have said—and I think that the Government agree with us—that it should be the subject of a free vote. The hon. Gentleman clearly has his views; perhaps other hon. Members will want to express theirs.

I was very interested in the speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who spoke from an interesting perspective. He was an opponent of the death penalty for murder, but made some interesting points about the retention of the death penalty for offences of treason in wartime. I am sure that the House will want to consider carefully that very serious subject.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will not be surprised to hear that I did not agree with much of what he said. He raised one important point. He spoke with some feeling about the system of local child curfews and of his experience of playing cricket as a lad in the streets, which I am sure many people share. If local child curfews are to be part of our armoury in the fight against disorder in areas where

disorder has been identified; why should they be restricted to children under the age of 10? The hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) spoke about children of eight, nine and 10, but the 10-year-olds would not be caught by the curfew; nor would those mentioned in the newspaper report quoted by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). What is to happen to older children?

We know that, in response to consultation, the Government have received representations specifically on the restriction of the curfew to children under 10. The Liberal Democrats as well as Labour lawyers came out against that restriction. If those two sets of the Government's most loyal supporters are against it, perhaps the Government ought to think again. The Home Secretary mentioned the city of Coventry, but it is also against the restriction, in response to consultation.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) asked the Government not to be dogmatic when considering amendments to the Bill, and we say amen to that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) made an important and well-informed speech. It was also authoritative, because he sits in the Crown court and sees the sort of problems that we are discussing. He was absolutely right to highlight the problem of drugs. He spoke about the vicious circle of drugs leading to ever more crime and was right to say that we need to make tackling drugs a higher priority.

We welcome the fact that the Government have implemented our provisions for mandatory sentencing for repeat drug offenders, but we want them to consider how the Bill might be strengthened to deal with not only drugs but the evil people who push them. We want tough action on that.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East said that one of the best things that the Government had done was to appoint a drugs tsar. I was slightly worried by that, because the drugs tsar has not done anything yet. We await his strategy with interest, because the mere fact of his appointment as a figurehead is not enough. We are looking for substance, not presentation, just as people across the country are looking for tough action. During the passage of the Bill, we shall be considering how the law against drugs and pushers can be strengthened.

I have already mentioned the speech of the hon. Member for Hull, North, who also drew attention to the young people who are well behaved, and we must not lose sight of that fact.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) put before the House some of the moral reasons for the problems that we are experiencing. He also highlighted problems affecting family life. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) made an excellent speech, in which he made some important points about resources. He also mentioned the question of 10 and 11-year-olds, to which I shall return.

In that context, it was quite fair of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford to ask what performance measurements the Government are setting for themselves. After all, the Bill sets performance indicators for local and police authorities, which will have to set targets by which they must judge how well they have done. What targets are the Government setting for themselves? How will they measure whether the Bill's provisions are successful? We shall be interested to hear from the Minister the criteria by which the Government will be judging the Bill.

We heard a great deal of hype. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire was right to warn us against going overboard. Let us hear the substance, not just presentation.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) spoke about paedophiles and sex offenders. I appreciate that, coming from Stirling, she spoke with particular force and feeling. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) warned that the Bill was being oversold. He, or another Liberal Democrat Member, said that the Government never came up with anything that was knowingly undersold, and that is certainly a danger. He also mentioned the danger of a Government with a large majority not listening, but we hope that they will listen in Committee.

The hon. Gentleman also drew attention to important differences between the Scottish and English legal systems. To those differences we would add another—why is it that a sex offender order in Scotland carries the power of arrest, when that is not the case in England? That is one of many drafting points to be considered in detail in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) made an important point about clause 53, which he was right to draw to the attention of the House. The clause removes the absolute bar on receipt of bail from defendants charged with homicide or rape who have a previous conviction for an offence of homicide or rape. That is clearly a matter of great public concern, to which we shall return.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough, in his elegant speech, spoke about the consequences of bad law and how we need to consider this subject with rigour. He made some important legal points about the anti-social behaviour orders and about the sort of behaviour that leads to the making of such an order.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) made a good speech, which the House appreciated. The House also listened with interest to the speeches of the hon. Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby), for Newark (Mrs. Jones), for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg). The hon. Member for Newark made some good points in a brief speech, and the House appreciates brevity in these circumstances. We also heard from the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore).

In the brief time left, I shall put to the Minister three points on which I want a specific response, because, in a debate such as this, it is not always possible to cover every important issue. I was a little surprised, although I quite understand the limitations of making such a wide-ranging speech, that the Home Secretary did not address the treatment of young offenders in some detail. That is an important subject, especially given the new sentence of detention and training, on which we have spent some time in the past.

The Home Secretary knows that the Bill contains a power to put young offenders aged 10 and 11 into custody alongside offenders aged 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17. That power is not for 10 and 11-year-olds who commit grave offences, for whom provision has already been made, but for young offenders who get into the sort of trouble that is an imprisonable offence when caused by an adult.

[Mr. James Clappison]

Will the Minister of State tell us why that power is being included in the Bill and what is the justification for it? I have submitted written questions on the subject, but the Government's answer is, in effect, "We are bringing in the provision because it is not needed." If it is not needed, why are the Government bringing it in? What is the explanation and what research led the Government to seek such a power?

We also want to know about the Government's plans in respect of home detention curfews. They have introduced a provision for early release of prisoners from their sentence through home detention curfew. To strike a note of discord, the Government know that we do not agree with that course of action, because they are making a mockery of honesty in sentencing and releasing prisoners far too early. Will the Minister of State tell me whether, under the provisions for home detention curfew, a prisoner sentenced to six months' imprisonment—the maximum sentence that a magistrates court can impose for a single offence—will serve a period in custody of only six or seven weeks? Will the Minister confirm whether six months will mean six weeks?

Will the Minister deal with the question of sex offenders? When the provisions for home detention curfew were originally unveiled, Ministers suggested that sex offenders would be eligible in precisely the same way as prisoners serving ordinary sentences of imprisonment. We know that, last week, the Government made a welcome change and in a written answer said that sex offenders would be eligible for home detention curfew only in "exceptional circumstances"—the Minister looks surprised, but that comes from a written answer from 31 March. Does the Minister agree that no sex offender who would be subject to the provisions of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 in respect of notification and so on should be released early from prison through tagging or home detention curfew? At the moment, it is possible for such a prisoner to be released.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) was far too kind in attributing to me the thesis about 15 and 16-year-olds being remanded in custody to adult prisons. It was not my thesis but that of the Prime Minister, who raised the matter on the Second Reading of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill and made a great song and dance about secure accommodation places. He told the House in that debate:

"the places could be achieved without delay. This country does not want to wait years before the problem is dealt with. It wants it dealt with now."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 40.]

So far, the Government have done precious little to deal with the problem. As the Minister knows, the record of this Government is that so far they have provided only a miserable six places in secure accommodation. I see the Minister nodding; he knows that that figure is right because it comes from the Government, but if it has been changed—*[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Gentleman is trying to contradict me. I want his response, and if six is not the right figure, will he tell the House what it is and when the Government will end the remand of 15 and 16-year-olds to adult prisons? We shall continue to press him about it—other hon. Members did, too—because that was an early pledge made by the Labour party, presumably in its pre-purge period.

We have witnessed a certain amount of purging of previous history by the Government Front-Bench team this evening. That promise was not a purged promise, but one given early on under new Labour. When will it be made good?

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): After six years of speaking from Labour's Front Bench on home affairs it is a pleasure and a relief to debate the first Bill in all that time that goes to the heart of crime and offers hope to communities throughout the country that have been demoralised by crime and disorder. In this measure, we are being tough on crime, but we are also offering hope and opportunity.

During today's debate, we have heard many fine speeches. Indeed, it was probably the best criminal justice debate that I have heard during my time in the House. Many of the speeches were brief but excellent. I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) that I will be in the city tomorrow to speak to a full council meeting about our proposals to tackle youth crime. No doubt he will be heckling me.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) support some of our innovative proposals, such as the youth curfews. I hope that he will support us further in the measures that we are introducing. He asked about the provision of detention and training orders. The main purpose is to tidy up the current mess—all the different sorts of orders and provision of secure places around the country. He asked for details of the different types of regimes and the way in which they will operate. He has missed the point, which is that the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales will be introduced to oversee and set standards and ensure quality and appropriate provision for youngsters in each of those places.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the sex offenders order. The breach of an order is a criminal offence punishable with five years' imprisonment, which means that it is automatically an arrestable offence under section 24 of the Police and Criminal and Evidence Act 1984, so he is under a misapprehension about the availability of appropriate powers. He also asked about the release of prisoners who are subject to the provisions of the Sex Offenders Act 1997. The whole point about the reference to exceptional circumstances is that normally sex offenders will not be allowed out on early release. I invite him to read the list of offences and to appreciate the wide range of sentences specified in that Act. There may be exceptional circumstances in which it is appropriate and just that release may apply, but it will not normally apply—and certainly not at all in the extreme cases, which are the ones that have caused the great debate over the past few days about the danger of sex offenders to children.

It is a total and absolute cheek for the hon. Member for Hertsmere to mention secure accommodation. I remind him that I was one of those who challenged the previous Government to do something to deal with the holding of youngsters aged 15 and 16 in adult prisons. We extracted a promise that they would remove them, and they took powers in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to do so. The only tiny thing that they did not do was to make arrangements to deal with the holding of those youngsters

in secure accommodation. In February 1991, when the Conservative Government made that promise, they calculated the number of places that were needed—but they are still not in place. This Government are serious about their promises and we will keep them. The previous Government made promises, but took seven years not to keep them.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): With regard to young people, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the excellent bid that has been put in by Northamptonshire to pilot some of the measures on youth offending. I urge him to ensure the approval of that bid, which will be a great success and greatly welcomed by communities such as Blackthorn, to which he spoke earlier this year.

Mr. Michael: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. I shall be totally objective and say that we will consider the applications that have been made. However, I take the opportunity of congratulating the authorities in Northamptonshire on the co-operation that has existed up to now. We have learnt lessons from the success of the diversion unit, which has used reparation as such an effective tool with young offenders.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Let me take the Minister back for one moment to the home detention and sex offender orders. As I remember, the governors will decide whether there is any risk in allowing people to be released early. Should we assume from what the Minister has said that the Government will be giving advice and guidance to governors as to which of the specific notifiable offences are to be considered as exceptional in the circumstances?

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Gentleman is right. We shall be giving clear guidance to governors. We have made it clear, and have acted on that since the implementation of the Sex Offenders Act 1997, that we must move from a culture of waiting to see what will happen to assessing risk and acting to prevent it from turning into reality with another victim. That is the type of approach that we shall adopt in this case, too.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was among those who asked how we would judge success. For his benefit, and that of the House, I echo the words of the *Evening Standard* leader tonight which says:

> "Londoners will believe that crime is going down when they really feel safer in their homes and on the streets, and when their insurance premiums stop rising."

It is our intention to ensure that people throughout the country feel safer and are safer. An important element of that is the setting of local targets by the partners—the police and the local authority—which will enable the local community to judge their success, just as we shall be judged on the success of our policies nationally.

Angela Smith (Basildon): Does my hon. Friend agree that an important way of reducing crime is through local partnerships, and that many local authorities, including my own in Basildon, welcome the duties placed on them by the Bill in that regard? Is my hon. Friend aware that that has already been undertaken without the support of Government and that the authority now welcomes the Government's support?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I saw the enthusiasm of the partners in Basildon—the local authority, the police and the voluntary sector—when I visited the town with my hon. Friend. Many of those who have already been enthusiastic about working in partnership have been desperate for the Government to provide support for the partnership approach in legislation. It needs a proper structure within which to be effective and within which we can see and measure the results so that we can increase the feeling of safety for the wider community.

Some Conservative Members showed imagination in claiming credit for paving the way for the Bill. That is particularly interesting considering that many of the Bill's key elements were voted down when they were tabled as amendments by the then Labour Opposition to a series of criminal justice Bills. Conservative Members should share my experience of meeting police officers—from chief officers to those at the sharp end—who are filled with enthusiasm for what we are doing in the Bill.

We are offering those police officers a massive challenge. One chief officer told me that we were asking them to measure their success not by how fast they answer the telephone or by how many crooks they catch, but by whether they cut crime. Rather than interim or more peripheral measurements, the real measurement is whether we succeed in the fight against crime. As the *Evening Standard* said, do we make people feel safer? That is the measurement that we shall apply to the police. We will not ask the police to do it on their own. We are asking them to work with the local authority as partners. We are asking the whole community and all agencies to be involved in the fight against crime.

Another hon. Member suggested that the Bill is rooted in previous Conservative speeches and legislation. Yes, the Conservatives were promising action for years, but it did not come. We supported the previous Government when they got it right, but the only connection between the provisions of this Bill and previous Bills is that our suggestions were voted down. The proposal for reparation was voted down in every year since 1993. The action plan order, the speeding up of youth justice, the anti-social behaviour order and statutory partnerships were all voted down. I welcome the support of Conservative Members for what we are proposing, but if there has been a U-turn, it has not been by Labour Members. I welcome Conservative Members' support for the measures that they have voted against in the past.

I will not be able to deal with all the specific points that have been raised, so I promise to write to hon. Members. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) made a number of points about the legislation. We will consider any constructive amendments that hon. Members may table in Committee. The Scottish clauses will be dealt with by the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office. As I promised earlier, we will propose that they be grouped together so that they can be dealt with coherently as a series of Scottish debates.

I must point out that there is no drafting error in clause 20. It is our intention that the chief constable should have the role of applying to the court for a sex offender order. That is an application to a civil court and it would be inappropriate to give a role in civil proceedings to the procurator fiscal.

[Mr. Michael]

It is also the intention—this applies equally to England and Wales—to deal in the Bill with racial offences. The definitions of racial groups in clause 30 and elsewhere build on existing race relations legislation, which applies throughout Great Britain. There would be great problems in attempting to widen the definition.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that the Jewish community is covered by the definition in the Bill. That is intentional in view of the extent to which that community has been the victim of a great deal of racial harassment and violence.

On anti-social behaviour orders and the point raised by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), I can tell the House that guidance, which will be offered, will make it clear that the target is not just odd behaviour or loud music. We are talking about continuous behaviour, over time, which causes harassment, alarm and the ruination of lives. Over the years, the criminal justice system has not been able to deal with the criminal, sub-criminal and violent behaviour that goes on over time.

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend has only three minutes left and I would like him to say what he intends to do about protocol 6, clause 33 and absentee landlords.

Mr. Michael: As my hon. Friend is well aware, that is covered by the Human Rights Bill rather than this Bill.

I should like to deal with some of the points made by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), who made some favourable and constructive comments about the Bill. I hope that the debate in Committee will see us looking practically at the issues before us. We will be able to answer many of his points in the detail.

We have considered how the anti-social behaviour orders and the local partnerships can work in a way that will ensure that they are practical. I can give the right hon. Gentleman an assurance that there is no conflict with the way that the policing plan operates, as set out in the Police Act 1996. Indeed, the local strategies will fit well with those approaches and create building blocks that will give an enhanced role to the strategic approach that the police authorities are intended to provide.

I am looking forward to the opportunity of serving on the Committee considering a Bill that contains so many significant and important elements.

As a magistrate and youth worker, I was very frustrated over the years by working in a creaking system that failed to engage young people. Young people were processed through the system as spectators in discussions about the offences in which they were supposed to have taken part—the system often dealt with them so late that they had forgotten what they had done by the time they were punished. The lives of victims were damaged, the community was undermined and the lives of young offenders were ruined.

The Government are taking action. The Bill gives the tools for the job to our partners the police, local government, the courts, parents and the community. That is why I believe that it will be a successful instrument for tackling crime and disorder in the community.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

CRIME AND DISORDER BILL [*LORDS*] [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure of a Minister of the Crown incurred under or by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided; and

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received by a Minister of the Crown under or by virtue of the Act.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NURSERY EDUCATION

That the Nursery Education (England) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 655) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Heathrow Terminal 5

10 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I beg leave to present a petition that was promoted and organised by the Putney Society, led, in this case, by Mandy James, convenor of the transport panel, assisted by Christine Reeves, David Radcliffe, Jean Dolman, Brian Towner and Judith Chegwidden, and signed by 5,479 residents of Putney, expressing their opposition to a fifth terminal at Heathrow airport. The petition states:

The petition of the Putney Society declares that local residents oppose the construction of a fifth terminal at Heathrow because the environmental costs will outweigh the economic advantages. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to refuse planning permission for the proposed new terminal.

And the petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Medical Accidents (Compensation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

10.1 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Current law and practice are harsh on the victims of medical accidents, as some form of blame has to be established before compensation for injury is due. Even where blame is justified, litigation is protracted, uncertain and expensive. Where an individual suffers permanent injury and is the exception to a general expectation of successful treatment, there may be no blame. As a result, either no compensation is available, or an attempt is made to demonstrate malpractice where there was none. Such claims of malpractice engender a defensive attitude to all complaints, throughout the medical profession and the health authorities.

In some cases, injury may arise through testing or developing a new medical procedure. There are bound to be heightened risks of unexpected side-effects arising from therapeutic innovations. If doctors are to be blamed and punished for taking such risks, they will be disinclined to initiate or test new methods, and innovation will be stifled. That is particularly true of doctors in some high-risk specialisations, such as obstetrics.

Litigation on account of alleged medical negligence is now epidemic in the United States of America, and, although there are many fewer cases in the United Kingdom, the number here has been rising by about 15 per cent. a year for the past five years. A survey in 1996 showed that 37 per cent. of consultants and senior registrars had been sued at least once.

In the time available, I want, first, to demonstrate that current arrangements for compensation through litigation for medical negligence fail both patients and doctors, and risk jeopardising innovation in medicine generally. Secondly, I want to persuade the Minister that a no-fault compensation scheme for medical accidents would overcome most of the difficulties.

Accepted medical practice is the yardstick by which a doctor is measured. That means that a doctor will not be found negligent if a patient is treated in accordance with a practice accepted by a responsible body of medical opinion. A medical negligence trial will therefore focus on defining what accepted medical practice is in the circumstances of a particular case.

The result is that any trial becomes a battle of strength between opposing experts. However, the plaintiff may have great difficulty in finding experts who are willing to testify. Doctors do not like to voice public criticism of their peers. Colleagues in the same authority simply refuse to testify against one another, and witnesses have to be found from another part of the country. For the defendant doctor, however, finding witnesses is far easier. As a result, cases drag on and on for as long as eight, nine or 10 years after a writ has been issued. During that time, no special provision is available to the victim, whose family may have to cope as best it can with a dreadful tragedy.

The outcome is also uncertain. In the case of Whitehouse *v.* Jordan, late at night Mr. Jordan attended Mrs. Whitehouse, whom he had never seen before. He attempted five or more times to deliver her baby using forceps before deciding to deliver by caesarean section. As a result, the child was profoundly handicapped. The fact that brain damage was caused in the course of delivery was never in question, but there were huge differences among eminent experts about whether what was done was accepted medical practice.

Mr. Jordan was found not to have been negligent, and, after a process lasting eight years, Mrs. Whitehouse was left to bring up her handicapped child, then aged 11, without any compensation to ease the burden. Equally, to have found Mr. Jordan negligent would have been unjust. He came to the case late at night for the very first time and took a course of action that many medical experts agreed was the right one.

In another case, Wilsher *v.* Essex, the test of accepted medical practice worked against a young junior doctor, who inserted a catheter into a vein instead of an artery. He asked a senior registrar to check what had been done, who failed to notice the mistake. The judgment of the junior doctor was not by the standards of a trainee or a learner but by the standards of more experienced and qualified colleagues.

Both those cases illustrate how unfair the present system can be to both patients and doctors.

The result of this litigation lottery is that only a small percentage of those suffering from a medical accident ever obtain compensation. Figures from the Legal Aid Board show that only 17 per cent. of legally aided medical negligence actions are successful. That compares with personal injury cases, including road and work accidents, where success rates are 85 to 90 per cent.

There is a view expressed that medical negligence cases are no different from any other negligence cases. The figures show clearly that that is not so. Establishing fault in medical cases is far more difficult than in others.

The litigation system is not cheap. In 1997, Lord Woolf, after his review of ways of streamlining civil litigation, observed that enough money to run a large health service trust was being spent annually on legal costs to deal with medical negligence claims. At the end of his survey, there were found to be 20,000 claims outstanding against the national health service, with over 90 per cent. of those litigants on legal aid. That adds to the overall problem because when a claimant is legally aided and loses, the NHS cannot apply for costs. In 1995–96, the NHS paid out £150 million in medical negligence settlements, with a disproportionate £56 million coming from London regions.

In summary, we have an expensive system to deal with medical accidents, which is not working. It is not compensating victims of medical accidents fairly, and it is subjecting doctors and health trusts to pressures with which they are ill equipped to cope.

Of the cases examined by the Legal Aid Board in 1996-97, 32 received £500,000 or more in compensation. However, the average damages awarded stood at about £4,107. It is disturbing that the cost of those cases was, on average, marginally greater than the compensation awarded, at £4,122.

All this is not just my judgment. The British Medical Association has said:

"For many years the medical profession have been concerned about the social injustices of the present tort based system and established a working party to look into instituting a no fault compensation system. Such a scheme, we believe, would relieve the patient of the necessity of lengthy and expensive legal cases, and

base compensation principally on the injured person's need. It is not our intention that such a scheme should protect professional staff if errors were made."

That last point—that the present system, for all its faults, may ensure the accountability of the medical profession—is worth dwelling on. Even today, there is a separate medical disciplinary procedure to ensure professional standards. That system would have to be adapted, but there is every reason why such a revised disciplinary system should continue to operate alongside a reformed compensation scheme. Indeed, it is likely that the absence of prolonged legal proceedings would better ensure that a doctor who is truly blameworthy could be brought to account quickly. Discipline and compensation do not need to be linked.

No-fault compensation schemes already operate in New Zealand and Sweden. Neither system is perfect, but they demonstrate that a no-fault compensation scheme is workable, and appears to deliver benefits to many claimants that the present UK adversarial system does not.

In 1978, the royal commission on civil liability and compensation for personal injury—the Pearson report—looked into a scheme for no-fault compensation in the United Kingdom. Although it decided not to recommend such a scheme, it called for progress on the New Zealand and Swedish schemes to be monitored. Several members of the commission found the arguments finely balanced.

The cost of a no-fault scheme is another question. In 1988, the King's Fund and the centre for socio-legal studies, Oxford, estimated that, in addition to continuing costs of the Department of Social Security, the present litigation scheme, based on 10 claims per 100,000 of the population per year, would cost £75 million per year, whereas a no-fault scheme may cost £120 million per year. Set against that are the delay and individual misery that might be saved by the no-fault scheme.

In addition, a far higher proportion of compensation goes to the victim under a no-fault scheme. In New Zealand, 93p of every £1 spent goes to the victims, and only 7p goes to administration. In Britain, the National Consumer Council claims that for every £1 awarded as compensation, 85p is taken up in costs.

In the time available, the issues cannot be dealt with in the detail that would make the case conclusive, but the lengthening list of individuals and inquiries that have considered a no-fault scheme as the right way to tackle the present inadequacy of litigation lends substantial support to the argument. Both the BMA and the Royal College of Physicians support the proposal. Sir Peter Middleton, in his "Review of Civil Justice and Legal Aid", suggested that the Government should investigate the alternatives to the current system of compensation, with specific reference to medical negligence.

In 1990, the present Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, and in 1991 Ms Rosie Barnes, the then Social Democratic party Member for Greenwich, brought Bills before the House to introduce no-fault compensation schemes, but they did not have the support of the Government and so did not progress. I do not believe that any of the criticism made of those Bills was insurmountable. There is nothing from existing schemes abroad or from previous objections to indicate that a no-fault compensation scheme for medical accidents is impractical or exorbitantly expensive.

There is a mountain of evidence that present arrangements for determining compensation for medical accidents are harsh, capricious and unjust. The arguments for a no-fault scheme are powerful, persuasive and supported by those who know the issues at first hand.

I hope that I may have persuaded the Minister that there is a strong case for examining such a scheme in depth, with a view to a no-fault scheme of compensation for medical accidents becoming a new dimension of our modernised welfare service.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) brings considerable knowledge of medical research and the NHS to bear on this topic. He is to be congratulated on having used the Adjournment debate to raise the issue of compensation for victims of medical accidents. It is a subject of obvious importance.

There can be few things more distressing for the victim and for friends and family than that someone should seek medical help and be harmed as a result. We well understand, therefore, what has caused my hon. Friend to bring the matter before the House—although I am afraid that I will not be able to satisfy him this evening.

There is a significant difference between harm caused by a negligent act and harm caused by a set of circumstances that could not reasonably have been foreseen. Much as we may wish to, we cannot give absolute guarantees—no one ever can—of a successful outcome to a medical treatment. No matter how careful we are, in all walks of life accidents can happen from time to time.

Sometimes, the actions or omissions of an individual are responsible for the harm that occurs. At other times, it is simply a set of circumstances that could not have been foreseen, or the result of a foreseeable risk that was nevertheless justified in the circumstances. The person who suffers the harm may have contributed to or caused the accident himself. Medicine is no different in that respect from any other activity.

We no longer live in times—we are glad of it—when it was presumed that the doctor knew best, and when everyone blindly accepted treatment without explanation or consideration of all the options. Generally, before any medical treatment is given today, the patient's consent must be obtained. To be valid, that consent must be freely given, and obtained only after sufficient information has been provided about the proposed treatment—its nature, its consequences, possible alternatives and any substantial risks. In that way, a balanced judgment can be made. If that does not happen, a patient may have the right to take legal action, or grounds for a legitimate complaint.

When an adverse effect is the result of third party misconduct or negligence, it is right that the harmed person should be able to seek some recompense. The underlying principles are clear cut and established under the common law. They apply to personal injury cases in general, not just those arising from health care. We are not persuaded that health care should be singled out for different treatment.

In the case of compensation for medical treatment, it is necessary to prove that a duty of care is owed by the NHS body; and that there has been negligence through an act

or omission; that there has been harm; and that the harm was caused by negligence. NHS bodies may already, in exceptional circumstances and within delegated limits relating to public expenditure, make ex gratia payments on the merits of individual cases. My hon. Friend will know that when clinical negligence is involved and a settlement has been negotiated following legal advice, upper limit is £1 million.

The Government recognise that pursuing a claim for medical negligence can be a lengthy and traumatic process. My experience in practice as a solicitor and barrister taught me how difficult such litigation is for those involved. Several years may elapse before a case finally comes to trial, making investigations more difficult and time-consuming.

Sometimes, NHS bodies seek to defend claims where liability should be admitted early on. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that we are seeking actively to discourage such practice, because it only prolongs the anguish of patients and clinicians alike, and leads to unnecessary increases in legal expenses. We want the valuable resources of the NHS to be used for patient care, not to line the pockets of lawyers. I have sympathy with the points made by my hon. Friend, but we are unable to take the road along which he invites us to travel.

Some argue that as it takes a long time for medical negligence cases to be heard, it is unfair on the litigant, and that a supposedly quicker no-fault scheme is the answer. The Government cannot agree with that. To pay compensation when no fault has been established would, to some extent, belittle the harm caused to others through a negligent act. It would also treat medical accidents in a different way from other personal injuries, and it may often be just as difficult to establish that the medical treatment had caused the injury as to prove that someone had been negligent.

Even under a no-fault liability scheme, causation would still have to be established. That is not always easy, and can be as difficult as establishing negligence. The amount of compensation would still have to be determined, and possibly disputed. Some of the most prolonged and bitter disputes are over the quantum. Legal action and legal fees would not necessarily be avoided, and the process could still be lengthy. The full extent of the injury would still need to be established, taking into account the longer-term prognosis. Within delegated limits, NHS bodies may already award compensation on an ex gratia basis up to a maximum of £50,000 where no fault has been established.

Money for a no-fault compensation scheme—which would not be cheap; we should be under no illusions about that—would have to be found from NHS resources, and would inevitably result in reducing the money available for direct patient care. It also seems to us that the cost of meeting injury claims would be shifted from those who were negligent to the community as a whole, and, by extension, to injured people themselves, because they are part of that community. There is also a risk that a no-fault culture could, over time, diminish clinical accountability, and we could no longer reassure patients that what had happened to them would not subsequently happen to somebody else.

Even under a no-fault scheme, professional bodies and the NHS would still have the responsibility to ensure that standards were maintained. Clinicians will always want to do the best by their patients, and that is just one of a number of considerations that would have to be addressed if such a scheme were ever to come before the House for consideration.

My hon. Friend referred to compensation for those who may have experienced harm while participating in innovative medical procedures. Research ethics committees, which offer independent, objective advice to NHS bodies on the ethics of research proposals to be carried out within the NHS, have an important role. They ensure, among other things, that those who agree to participate in such research—which may involve a risk—are told at the outset not only of the nature of any risk, but of the compensation arrangements that will obtain in the event of the research subject's being harmed.

Mention has been made—and it has been the way for as long as I have studied or practised law—of the existence of no-fault compensation schemes in New Zealand and Sweden. I recall the considerable interest, and indeed controversy, that surrounded the establishment of the scheme in New Zealand. It would, however, be dangerous to make a direct comparison between those two countries and ours. There are many differences between the jurisidictions, and it is important to recognise the way in which no-fault compensation schemes have developed to reflect the broader context of the countries in which they were established.

In Australia and Canada, consideration was given to a no-fault compensation scheme, but, ultimately, the idea was rejected. There are few such schemes in the European Union.

Clinical negligence costs the national health service £200 million a year. That is not good enough, and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has expressed our fear that the figure will continue to rise. The best way to ensure that it does not is to raise standards, and that is what we have promised to do. Our proposals for a national institute for clinical negligence and a commission for health improvement will help to raise standards of performance, and reduce the risk of adverse incidents occurring in the first place.

Our White Paper "The New NHS" puts quality organisation, evidence-based practice in day-to-day delivery of NHS services and the infrastructure to support that at the heart of what we seek to achieve. We want clinicians to be involved in quality improvement programmes, disseminating good practice, using high-standard clinical risk reduction programmes, identifying adverse incidents, and learning the lessons that need to be learned from them. All that can contribute to a reduction in the number of costly negligence claims.

I commend the use of mediation, which presents a real alternative to long and costly court cases. A pilot project in two English regions, Anglia and Oxford, and Northern and Yorkshire, is making an important contribution to our body of knowledge. It will establish whether mediation is a viable option for the NHS as a whole. We also look

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

forward to the Lord Chancellor's work in reforming the civil justice system. All in all, we believe that that package of measures is the best way forward, that it will ensure that the victims of medical negligence and medical accidents are properly compensated, and that the public will receive the reassurance that is their due.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that what is wanted is

"explanation, not litigation. Apologies, not accusations. Excellence, not excuses."

In the new NHS, that is just what we seek to achieve.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 20 April 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Film Industry

1. **Ms Christine Russell** (City of Chester): What plans the Government have to respond to the distribution needs of the film industry. [37404]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): I refer my hon. Friend to "A Bigger Picture", the report of the Film Policy Review group, co-chaired by myself and Mr. Stewart Till, to whom I give the thanks of my Department and, I am sure, of the House, for his splendid work with others. The report was published on 25 March. It proposes a number of measures to promote the wider distribution of British films.

Ms Russell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on an excellent report, which I hope all right hon. and hon. Members will read. I am sure that my right hon. Friend shares my concern about the increasing difficulty that a number of film societies have in obtaining prints of new releases, especially when they are restricted to being able to show films on 16 mm equipment. I am sure also that my right hon. Friend agrees with me that we do not want to force the closure of all our town and city-centre film venues, thereby forcing everyone to get into his or her car to go out of town. Does my right hon. Friend have any plans—can anything be done—to keep film societies afloat?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments on the review. There has been a positive response on both sides of the Atlantic.

I am aware of my hon. Friend's involvement with the Chester film society, which celebrates its 25th year in 1998. I know that the society uses 16 mm film. I shall be discussing with the British Film Institute a strategy for the use of modern methods of cinema technology, which I hope will include the interests of film societies.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Is the Minister aware that it is becoming harder and harder since 1 May to attract international film makers to this country because of the strength of the pound? Given that, why is it that the London Film Commission, which was set up with the help of the previous Government and which has helped to attract millions of pounds of film investment into the capital, has received a grant insufficient even to guarantee its future until the end of the year?

Mr. Clarke: First, it does not help when the hon. Gentleman gets his facts considerably wrong. Secondly, it does not help when he talks down Britain when people abroad are investing in British films. We want to encourage them to do so.

The previous Government left not one penny to the Labour Government to save the London Film Commission. In spite of that, my right hon. and hon. Friends produced £100,000. Working with others, we saved the commission. It is delighted, as the hon. Gentleman should be.

Television Licence Concessions

2. **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): What plans his Department has to introduce further television licence concessions. [37405]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The Government's agreement with the BBC provides for a review of future funding arrangements prior to March 2002. That review will include a detailed consideration of licence fee concessions.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank the Minister for his answer, but the House will be aware that, before the recent Budget, there was much floating of a trial balloon by the Government in relation to suggestions that there would be free television licences for all pensioners. Will the Minister confirm that the trial balloon was shot down because the Treasury simply refused to sanction the proposal?

Mr. Fisher: No. The trial balloon was floated by the media, not by the Treasury. The hon. Gentleman, having been parliamentary private secretary to the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), the previous Secretary of State, will know the difficulties surrounding the concession scheme. It is probably full of anomalies and imperfections. Our Department receives more correspondence about this matter than almost any other. It is genuinely a difficult matter. To extend the existing concession scheme to all pensioner households would cost, at latest figures, £471 million. That is a considerable sum, which we shall have to examine carefully when we come to the review.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that on 16 January 1987 my private Member's Bill was voted down by 21 votes? Tory Cabinet Ministers were chauffeured from across the road to the House to vote down a Bill that would have given tremendous help to many pensioners. Does he agree that concessionary television licences should be introduced when it is possible to do so, because, as he says, so many elderly people want and need them? Such licences would be fair and a form of justice, and I shall continue to press for them to be introduced as early as possible.

Mr. Fisher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding hon. Members of his 1987 Bill. He will recall

that those who voted against it included the right hon. Member for South–West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) and the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude)—their opposition says it all.

Piers (Lottery Funding)

3. **Mr. Ronnie Fearn** (Southport): How many piers in England and Wales have received lottery funding in excess of £100,000 since 1 May 1997. [37406]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): One seaside pier has received lottery funding since 1 May 1997. The Brighton west pier trust was awarded a grant of £10.6 million in March 1998 by the heritage lottery fund for the restoration of the pier's substructure.

Mr. Fearn: I thank the Minister for our recent meeting, which was helpful. The Secretary of State said in the lottery debate that his criterion would be that lottery funding would go to people rather than to buildings. I agree, but piers do not come into the category of buildings or into any other category: they are one of their own. Southport pier attracts 144,000 people each year, but it is in need of repair, and we need lottery funding. Will the Minister put piers in a different category when heritage funding is considered?

Mr. Clarke: On the general point, the hon. Gentleman and others can debate those matters when the National Lottery Bill is discussed. With regard to Southport pier, he led a delegation, which I was delighted to meet, and its members spoke fluently for their cause. To help the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, I should say that this is a matter for the heritage lottery fund, which expects to receive a revised application; it would be in their interests to submit it as soon as possible.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): The constituents of my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), who is not in the Chamber, are grateful for the £11 million investment in the Brighton west pier trust, which will generate about £30 million investment in the area. Is not such partnership funding the way to secure the future of piers such as the Brighton west pier, which is the only grade I listed pier in the country?

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks; the people of Brighton and many others are grateful for the funding. The major difference between Brighton west pier, which is of grade I status as my hon. Friend says, and Southport pier is that, until now, Southport pier, alas, has been grade II.

Arts

4. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): What proposals he has to encourage the arts outside London; and if he will make a statement. [37407]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The Government are determined that the arts and the work of artists should be encouraged and supported in every part of this country, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a new £5 million fund, the new audiences initiative, at the time of the Budget.

Mr. Waterson: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he agree that many genuinely community-based groups in every aspect of the arts—for example, the Rude Mechanicals theatre group in my constituency—are benefiting or should benefit from funding through the Arts Council or through lottery funding every bit as much as high-profile organisations such as Covent Garden?

Mr. Fisher: I entirely agree, and I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is obviously getting some early midsummer night's dreaming in with his Rude Mechanicals. Of course he is right. It is a well made point because it is the community arts, and particularly the non-professional arts, that contribute so much to cultural life and do not receive enough consideration either in the House or in the media.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my hon. Friend consider carefully the question of music in the sense both of music making and providing music? In the north-west, we have a vigorous tradition of excellent music, but, sadly, it looks as though some music teaching is to be abandoned in the education service, which is very worrying. It will deprive us of a whole sector of important cultural activity.

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is underlined by, for example, last year's report of the associated board of the Royal Schools of Music, which shows a worrying trend and a decline in the number of people learning and teaching music. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are examining the matter with considerable urgency, and hope to make a substantial announcement later in the summer, with some new initiatives to kick-start the teaching of music in schools and for young people. The new initiatives that we are providing in the National Lottery Bill may help us to do that.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): In view of the pressure on the arts budget, particularly now that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has helped himself to so much lottery funding, does the hon. Gentleman have any plans to ensure that some of the major national London arts groups are funded directly by his Department rather than through the Arts Council? Does he intend that the Royal Opera house or English National Opera will be a direct client of his Department, as the museums are, and will no longer be, as I say, the Arts Council's responsibility, which would clear its desk, so that it could help the arts outside London more evenly?

Mr. Fisher: No. We have no such plans, although, as part of our departmental spending review, we are examining the whole way in which our Department allocates its expenditure.

On the right hon. Lady's first point, she must not continue to make a point that she knows is not correct. As a result of the national lottery, £10 billion comes to cultural life and the good causes. That money is still coming, and it is going to do good throughout the country. She should recognise and welcome that.

Museums and Galleries (Dudley)

5. **Mr. Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): What measures he has taken to ensure that the new access fund supports museums and galleries in Dudley. [37408]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Perhaps I might be permitted to observe at the outset that access to cultural recreation, particularly sporting activity of all kinds, was something dear to the heart of our late and much loved colleague Denis Howell. We remember him today with great affection.

On the specifics of my hon. Friend's question, museums and galleries in Dudley may apply for support from the heritage lottery fund's access fund in the same way as all other museums and galleries throughout the United Kingdom. A total of £7 million has been set aside for that purpose for 1998–99.

Mr. Cranston: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, and congratulate him on the moneys that have been made available. I raise two issues for the longer term. The first concerns education packs. As a matter of policy, Dudley museum does not charge, but it does have to charge for education packs, even though teachers can freely reproduce them.

The other issue concerns, I am sure, other museums—physical access. Many of the museums are in older buildings. Physical access is difficult for older people and disabled people. For example, in Dudley museum recently, we had an exhibition on the first world war. Many older people had great difficulty getting in. Will my right hon. Friend take those two points into account in the long term?

Mr. Smith: Yes. Both those issues, which my hon. Friend has rightly raised—the development of educational initiatives in museums and galleries and the ability of people with physical impairment to gain physical access to museums and galleries—would fall specifically within the province of the heritage lottery new fund. Dudley museum will, I am sure, be interested in putting in an application for consideration.

Media Mergers

6. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy on cross–border media mergers. [37410]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Government have no plans to amend the media ownership rules revised by the Broadcasting Act 1996. These permit, of course, cross-border holdings within the European Union.

Mr. Viggers: On how many occasions in the past year has the Prime Minister personally intervened in such matters?

Mr. Smith: As far as I am aware, the Prime Minister has had one 30-second reference to the matter in a conversation with the Italian Prime Minister, and on no other occasion has he intervened.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us who live in the regions are more concerned about what happened to cross-border television and independent regional television services under the previous Government, when many of us lost our independent regional broadcasting? Is it not about time that we reminded the viewing public of that? Will the Labour Government make sure that there are independent news services and local community services when companies such as Granada Television, which took over Yorkshire Television, become part of a much greater sector?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. The regional character and flavour of programme making, especially in the ITV network, has been one of the great strengths of independent television over the years. Sadly, it was put in some danger by the changes introduced by the previous Government, who seemed completely uninterested in quality and interested only in the price tag when they changed the franchising system. We have made it very clear to the Independent Television Commission that we regard it as one of its prime duties to uphold the regional character and the regional sourcing of programmes when it considers matters relating to ITV.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): How predominant does an international multi-media group have to become before it triggers concern and intervention by this Government?

Mr. Smith: The rules are very clearly laid down in legislation passed by the Conservative Government.

Drama and Television

7. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): What assessment he has made of the contribution which *(a)* drama and *(b)* television make to the United Kingdom economy. [37411]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): No separate estimate is available for drama, although the revenues of the much wider other entertainments category totalled nearly £6 billion in 1997. Television and radio combined had total revenues of almost £10 billion in 1997.

Mr. Mitchell: The figures that my right hon. Friend has just given go some way to illustrating the importance of these industries. Given their impact on employment and the balance of payments, and given also that they brighten the quality of our lives, is there not a case for adding to the help, support and encouragement that he has already given them, especially in respect of training, which has suffered badly from the fragmentation of the television industry? That would enable us to do better at combating the huge advantage that the Americans gain from their huge domestic market, and the huge advantage that the French have from cultural and linguistic subsidies.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. I welcome, as I am sure he does, the dialogue between film and television, and the interest of both in training. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that total revenues of spectrum estimates indicate a turnover from the creative industries as a whole of around

£55 billion, £12 billion of which is generated from exports. Creative industries like those to which he referred are of the utmost importance to my Department and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and my hon. Friend can be sure that we share his values.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is it not the case that most people who work in the film industry originally trained in television, not only at the BBC but with independent companies? Although I welcome the last Budget, which helped the film industry, will the right hon. Gentleman urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer also to give some thought to withholding tax, which at present is still a disincentive for some American film companies to come to the United Kingdom, even though they invest here in large numbers?

Mr. Clarke: It ought to be said that, with regard to the film industry, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been the most generous Chancellor in history. In his Budget, within eight weeks of being in government, he gave a three-year, 100 per cent. write-off to film production. On the day that the document that I have in my hand was published, in which the review group—consisting in the main of people from the film industry, from television and from skill set involved in training—recommended an extra year, the Chancellor outdid even that and gave an extra two years, so things are not going too badly.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend the Minister will know that the film review recommended that the broadcasting industry—which makes tremendous use of film—should contribute to the all-industry fund. Has he had any response from the television industry to that proposal?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. BBC, Channel 4, ITV and BSkyB already have a good record of investing in film production. Broadcasters recognise that the voluntary contribution suggested in the review is appropriate for all who now use film, including broadcasters and cinema and video distributors. There has been a very positive response.

News International

8. **Mr. Tim Collins** (Westmorland and Lonsdale): What meetings he has held with representatives of News International in the last month to discuss cross–media ownership; and if he will make a statement. [37412]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I have not held any meetings with News International to discuss this subject in the last month. I briefly met Mr. Rupert Murdoch and representatives from BSkyB—in which News International has a 40 per cent. holding—together with other key players in the European audio-visual industry, at the Birmingham audio-visual conference on 6 April.

Mr. Collins: Has the Minister or any of his officials ever discussed policy issues relating to News International with Mr. Tim Allan at No. 10 Downing street? Does he believe that 28-year-old Mr. Allan has been offered a salary of £100,000 a year because of his mastery of the motor scooter or because of his access to the heart of Government?

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): The politics of envy.

Mr. Smith: The answer is no—I have never discussed such matters with Mr. Allan. That question, coming from a former Tory communications director, smacks a little of jealousy.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Does my right hon. Friend welcome the statement that Mr. Murdoch made at the Birmingham conference, when he said that he looked forward to the day when Britain was fully integrated into Europe? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the traditional strength of the British audio-visual industry is such that it should be the leading player in Europe? Far from adopting the rather xenophobic protectionist line of Conservative Members—just sour milk because Rupert has gone off them—should we not be backing any British companies that promote British film and British media ownership across Europe and the rest of the world?

Mr. Smith: I did, indeed, note with considerable interest Mr. Murdoch's statement in his speech at the Birmingham conference, when he looked forward to the future integration of Europe. However, he made one or two other observations with which I could not agree, such as his attack on public service broadcasting. I tried to put the record right with a robust defence of public service broadcasting during my closing speech at the conference.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): At the time when the Prime Minister acceded to Mr. Murdoch's request to intervene with the Italian Prime Minister in favour of the recent BSkyB bid, did he know that his deputy press spokesman was already negotiating to take on a senior job with BSkyB? Was Mr. Allan the conduit for Mr. Murdoch's request for help? Were Cabinet Office officials consulted about his subsequent appointment? Did they know of any role that Mr. Allan played in the Prodi affair?

Mr. Smith: I think that most people are interested in rather more substantive issues, which include the matter on which Mr. Murdoch addressed the Birmingham conference last week. That related to the approval which I gave on 13 October last year for the start-up by the BBC of 24-hour news—something which Mr. Murdoch and BSkyB greatly resented.

Any charges that this Government give particular favours to particular media companies are completely false. We deal with each issue on its merits, as my decision in October shows.

Lottery (Burton)

9. **Mrs. Janet Dean** (Burton): How lottery distributors, when formulating their strategy, will assess need in the Burton constituency. [37413]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Distributors will consult widely when drawing up their strategies. This consultation will include local authorities and other local interests. The new proposed policy directions, drafts of which are in the Library of the House, emphasise the need to ensure that lottery funds reach all parts of the country and all sections of society.

Mrs. Dean: I welcome my right hon. Friend's reply. My constituency has some of the most deprived wards in the west midlands. Will the new lottery legislation ensure that help gets to where it is most needed in those wards?

Mr. Smith: Yes, in two ways. First, the new policy directions—drafts of which I have issued—will ensure that all lottery distributors take proper account of the need to combat social deprivation when considering making grants. Secondly, distributors will be able to instigate fast-track procedures for small community grants which will get rid of a lot of the red tape and excessive paperwork which at the moment bedevil applications by small community organisations eminently deserving of grant.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Will not the National Lottery Bill result, effectively, in the decisions on which projects in Burton are supported by lottery funds being taken by Ministers? Is that not why virtually every Labour Back Bencher who spoke in support of the Bill at Second Reading did so on the explicit basis that the Bill will make it easier for the Secretary of State to direct lottery money to the constituencies of Labour Members of Parliament?

Mr. Smith: No, Madam Speaker. It may not surprise you that the right hon. Gentleman is wrong on all counts. I was interested to receive a letter from the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley)—the former Secretary of State—who spends most of her time, like the right hon. Gentleman, accusing us of creating the new opportunities fund to somehow deal with our priorities. In her letter she referred to a dyslexia centre in her constituency, and said:

"The changes in direction—

the changes we are proposing in the Bill—

should provide an excellent opportunity for them. I wonder if you could brief me on the likely timetable in which applications will be received for the new opportunities fund."

Opposition Members are seeing the wonderful opportunities that will come about through the legislation.

Lottery Funding

10. **Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): What plans he has to review the criteria relating to the eligibility of good causes to receive lottery funding. [37414]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The National Lottery Bill creates a new, sixth good cause encompassing health, education and the environment. I am consulting on a new package of draft policy directions governing the distribution of lottery funds for the existing good causes, and expect to issue the formal directions shortly.

Mr. Skinner: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the things which characterised the lottery when it was run by the Tory Government was that they favoured their own people and their own marginal seats? As evidence of that, the three seats in north Derbyshire—Bolsover, North-East Derbyshire and Chesterfield—finished in the lowest 10 per cent. of all constituencies in Britain in terms of receiving grant. It is clear that somebody was making a serious attempt to ensure that we did not get much of a return. Since the Labour Government are in charge, will my right hon. Friend remedy that and help those areas of social deprivation? It is not a matter of favouring anybody—it is about favouring those people who have not had a fair crack of the whip hitherto.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This should not be a matter of favouring particular parts of the country because of their political affiliation. It should be about ensuring that there is a fair geographical spread across the country and that issues of social deprivation are properly taken into account. Both will result from the changes in direction and legislation that we are proposing.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is the Secretary of State aware of the concern expressed by the chief executive of the mental health charity Sane about the fact that her helpline, which deals with many thousands of people who are contemplating suicide, has had its applications for lottery grants turned down three times, whereas a helpline for owners bereaved after the death of a pet, which deals with a much smaller number of people, has received a grant of £180,000? Does he not think that a strange set of priorities? Does he agree that the lottery of the lottery should be in the choosing of numbers and the winning of prizes, not in the awarding of grants?

Mr. Smith: Certainly the awarding of grants should not be a lottery, but the hon. Gentleman will know—as, indeed, the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman has just pointed out—that those decisions are strictly a matter for the National Lottery Charities Board, not for me.

Cricket

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What steps he is taking to improve standards in cricket in the United Kingdom. [37418]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Working through the English Sports Council, we are encouraging the England and Wales Cricket Board in its plans to widen access to the game, to build the quality of the competitive game in England and to improve performance in international competition.

Mr. Hughes: That is a good statement of principle, for which I thank the Secretary of State. Will he be more proactive in ensuring that standards are such that we can expect to win test series this year and in the future, rather than think that we will win, but then lose? Will he consider calling for an audit, local authority by local authority, of facilities for teaching cricket and of incentives to youngsters to learn? On each estate in constituencies such as his and mine, places could be marked out as nets—it is very simple—so that kids could play cricket in the yard just as they play football and other games. If that happened, we might get people who could win some test matches for us.

Mr. Smith: Like the hon. Gentleman, I look forward with a mixture of optimism and trepidation to the test

matches against South Africa and Sri Lanka later this summer. It is important that we ensure the promotion of excellence, which is why we very much hope that the England and Wales Cricket Board will put forward proposals for a national cricket academy as part of the United Kingdom sports institute network.

It is also important that we consider the broad base of mass participation, which is why I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have welcomed the decision that I took with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to halt the unnecessary sale of school playing fields, so that schoolchildren have the facilities to learn and play.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Will my right hon. Friend congratulate the England women's cricket team, which returned to this country yesterday morning—on the same plane as me—from its successful tour of South Africa? What steps are his Department taking to encourage more women to take part in cricket?

Mr. Smith: I congratulate both the England women's cricket team and my hon. Friend. I am particularly pleased that £157,000 of world-class performance grants have been made available to the team so that it can develop the excellence of its game. I am also pleased that the Women's Cricket Association has decided to merge with the England and Wales Cricket Board, which I think bodes well, especially for the board.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Is it not rather bizarre that anyone should look to the Government to improve cricket, as the essence of new Labour spin doctoring is that it is not cricket?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is batting on rather a sticky wicket. It is important that the Government ensure mass participation in sports of all kinds, including cricket, and excellence. Both are very much at the heart of the Government's sports policy.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): As the question refers to cricket in the United Kingdom, may I remind the Secretary of State that cricket is played in Scotland and that Aberdeen cricket club had a Caribbean professional long before the 1939–45 war? I further remind him that some Scots have played for England, and that two of the world cup games will be played in Scotland. Will he impress upon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland the need to increase coaching facilities throughout Scotland? My right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. Dewar) and his colleagues in the Scottish Office are not known as great cricket fans. We need an expansion of cricket coaching facilities throughout Scotland.

Mr. Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is well known, however, as a man of great fairness and integrity and I am sure that he will have listened carefully to my hon. Friend, whose remarks I shall draw to his attention.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE

The Minister was asked—

Millennium Dome

27. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What action he is taking to ensure that the millennium dome will enable the best British design and innovation to be exhibited. [37434]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The dome itself is a flagship of British design and innovation—Richard Rogers's design, in scale and construction, shows the world the best of the nation's talent and creativity; the content will be a reflection of the spectacular imagination of British companies and British-based designers.

Mr. Sheerman: Did my hon. Friend see the report by Business Strategies last week pointing up the vital importance to this country's future wealth creation of the creative industries, including those in design and innovation? As so much interest is being expressed by people at home and overseas in visiting the dome, will he ensure that the impact of the dome and what happens in it are not just felt during its time, but will influence future creativity, innovation and design as we go into the millennium?

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend makes a good point, with which I agree. It is extraordinary that some people in this country like to carp and sneer at our creative industries and at what they call "cool Britannia". My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the Business Strategies report of last week, which noted that the creative industries contribute some £50 billion to our national economy and that they will be the fastest-growing source of new jobs between now and 2006.

While I am on the subject of jobs, I should say that in today's *Evening Standard*, it is estimated that millennium tourism will create 50,000 new jobs. That is what the *Evening Standard* calls a "jobs bonanza". I do not care what the paper calls it: it will be good news for many people and their families in this country.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the dome's token nod to British content, which is apparently to be called "UK@Now", is being designed by a Frenchman? Is that the Frenchman who described the dome as "very un-British", which the Minister said last week he took as "a great compliment"? Does he agree with the spokesman for the dome who, when the story about the French designer came out, said:

"As far as we are concerned David Bentheim is doing it himself but if he wants to farm it out to someone else that is cool with us."

Does that not make a mockery of the Prime Minister's brave words at the launch that the dome is

"a display of confidence in the creativity and talents of our people"?

Presumably he meant British people.

Mr. Mandelson: I notice that, the better we do and the more progress we make in constructing the millennium

dome and its contents, the weaker the right hon. Gentleman's questions become. One day he will give us all a shock and say something positive about the millennium dome, which was, after all, his party's original idea. However, perhaps it is just very cool in today's Conservative party to pour cold water on the ideas and vision that were originally shown by his right hon. Friends.

Millennium Experience

28. **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): What events are proposed at the millennium experience for the evening of 31 December 2000. [37435]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): I am tempted to say that my hon. Friend should give us a break before asking questions about the closing ceremony. Preparations for that ceremony are at an early stage, and it is too soon for final decisions.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am somewhat disappointed by the tone of that reply, bearing in mind the fact that the eve of the millennium is the last day of December 2000 and the first day of the millennium is 1 January 2001. When we are emphasising the need for arithmetic to be taught correctly in schools, I should have thought it incumbent on Her Majesty's Government to mark the arithmetically correct time of the millennium change.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Mackinlay: Before they nod, Conservative Members should reflect on the fact that they got it wrong as well. It is important that this Parliament should at least give some recognition to the fact that the eve of the millennium is the last day of 2000. We should get it right, or we shall look profoundly silly. The Victorians got it right: newspapers of 1900-01 show that they marked the change of the century on the eve of 1901. We ought to be able to get it right, too.

Mr. Mandelson: Whatever the technical truthfulness of my hon. Friend's observation, I can assure him that, whenever the opening and closing ceremonies take place, they will reflect the full breadth and success of the celebrations that we have planned. I am determined to ensure that the whole year-long celebrations are accessible to as many people as possible, and not only to the well-heeled and the very important.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Whatever the closing date of the dome may be—or perhaps, following the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), I should say, "la date de fermeture"—is it not completely irrelevant, given that, although there were supposed to be 12 million visitors, we have already heard that the plan to provide river transport has failed, and London Transport says that there will not, after all, be 24 trains an hour? How can there be a closing, when the opening will be unsuccessful, as nobody will be able to get there?

Mr. Mandelson: The innovative integrated transport systems that are being developed—the Jubilee line extension, the new river services and riverside walks, and even a cable car service across the Thames—will be among the most important legacies of the millennium experience.

The article in *The Times* last week was not correct, as I shall set out in a letter to the editor. As part of his Thames 2000 initiative, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced last month—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may not like to hear the facts, but I shall give them to the whole House none the less. My right hon. Friend announced the allocation of £21 million to boost new passenger services on the river, and we expect 1 million people to travel to Greenwich by boat from central London using those services, which will certainly become a jewel in the capital's transport network.

29. **Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What progress has been made on the national programme for the millennium experience. [37436]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company has established 12 national programme offices in the nine regions of England and in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Staff in those offices are providing a one-stop shop source of information about how to engage in the United Kingdom-wide programme of events and activities and in the nation's millennium festival.

Mr. Tipping: Is my hon. Friend aware of the feeling in north Nottinghamshire and, I suspect, in Hartlepool, that people living in London and the south-east are advantaged to the disadvantage of people in the midlands and the north? Will he take steps to ensure that people throughout the United Kingdom have the opportunity to celebrate the millennium?

Mr. Mandelson: The Government are absolutely determined to ensure affordable access to the millennium dome for all people from every part of the country, but the millennium does not mean only the dome. It means the £100-million nationwide festival of sporting, artistic and heritage events, bids for which can be submitted from next week; the huge range of capital projects being funded by the millennium commission at over 3,000 locations throughout the country; and the millennium awards, which will fund ordinary people throughout the country to do extraordinary things, from pensioner inventors in Cornwall to special needs workers in Northamptonshire. In other words, it means a national movement to change the landscape of our country and really make a difference to the way we live our lives. That is what the millennium celebrations mean, and that is why the Government are backing them.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Is the Minister not aware that the millennium celebrations actually mean the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ? Is he not ashamed of the fact that, throughout all that great tirade and, indeed, his answers to the other questions this afternoon, he did not mention that once, and that the importance he gives to it in his dome is so ludicrously small?

Mr. Mandelson: The hon. Gentleman's view is not shared by His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury,

with whom I had a recent meeting and who expressed himself well content with the proper acknowledgement that we are giving to the birth of Christ and the contribution of the Christian religion to this country. We will continue to work with him, his colleagues and other members of the multi-faith Lambeth group to ensure that all those objectives are properly reflected and fulfilled.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Bishops (Vehicles)

37. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What vehicles are available to bishops and how many chauffeurs are supplied; and what was the total cost of running these vehicles, including depreciation, and employing the chauffeurs for the latest year for which figures are available. [37445]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Official cars provided for bishops have engine capacities in a range from 1.6 to 2.3 litres. In 1997, the net cost of providing and maintaining bishops' cars was £279,000. Seven bishops use their own cars and are paid a mileage allowance. In 1997, 31 bishops employed full or part-time drivers. The cost of those to the commissioners was £317,000.

Mr. Baker: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that money spent on chauffeurs and very large-engined cars is not regarded sympathetically by people in parishes who see their churches closing and otherwise short of money? Would the money not be better diverted to helping to take the Christian mission to the country at large?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Bishops have a demanding ministry, as he will know, and an increasing work load. The use of a driver can give them valuable extra time and relieve them of some pressure when travelling to and from their many and varied engagements. Several of the drivers also work as gardeners or handymen at see houses, or are part-time.

Arms Exports

38. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): What discussions he has had on the arms exporting policy of companies in which the Church Commissioners have invested. [37446]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The question of company policy on the export of arms has recently been put to GEC and GKN. Both companies have given assurances that they adhere strictly to the United Kingdom Government's licence terms for such sales.

Ann Clwyd: Has my hon. Friend followed events recently in east Java, Indonesia, where, on 8 April, British-supplied water cannons were used to fire toxic liquids and tear gas at unarmed students? Is it not time that the Church Commissioners reviewed their policy in view of those facts, especially as the water cannons have been used not once but many times against unarmed demonstrators? They should review their policy in the light of those incidents and I want my hon. Friend's assurance that they will do just that.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising those matters, as she habitually does. The Church Commissioners are always grateful to her, and listen to her with great care. As Church investors, we are acutely aware of the strength of feeling that those issues arouse within the Church and among the public at large. Our policy as commissioners draws a distinction between, on the one hand, a legitimate British defence industry that supplies equipment under Government licence to the Ministry of Defence and our NATO partners and, on the other, the supply of equipment as part of the international arms trade, albeit also under Government licence.

Ethical Investment

39. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What recent discussions have taken place between the Church Commissioners and diocesan authorities about ethical investment. [37447]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Members of the Church of England's ethical investment working group frequently meet and give presentations to various diocesan bodies regarding the Church's ethical investment policy.

Mr. Hughes: Would the hon. Gentleman ensure that there is not merely regular or some contact between the dioceses and the Church Commissioners, but some mechanism whereby, before any decision is taken by a diocese, such as mine of Southwark, which I read had invested in the defence industries, it is fully briefed on the implications and alternatives, and on issues that relate to the Jubilee 2000 repayment of debt agenda? Many countries that buy arms sold by the companies in which our diocese invests could pay off or reduce their debts and spend on more worthwhile activities if they did not buy those arms.

Mr. Bell: Under the Cathedrals Measure 1963, chapters are requested to seek our advice before investing, although they are not required to follow it. The Church Commissioners publish information about the ethical investment policy of the Church's central investing bodies. It is widely circulated and a report is made annually to the General Synod of the Church of England. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a review of the Cathedrals Measure, and a Cathedrals Measure will come before the House shortly.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE

The Minister was asked—

Millennium Dome

30. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement regarding the role of BSkyB as a sponsor of the millennium dome. [37438]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): BSkyB is one of the four founding partners of the millennium experience. Founding partners have the opportunity to work with the New Millennium Experience Company's staff and design teams in developing the content of exhibits in the dome. Additionally, where founding partners' support covers the company's challenge programme of country-wide events and activities, they will have similar opportunities to work with the company's staff in the development of that programme.

Mr. Swayne: Will BSkyB get any exclusive television coverage rights?

Mr. Mandelson: No, it will not.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Given the public interest in sponsorship and other arrangements for the dome, when does the Minister intend to publish the business plan for the millennium dome, in line with the recommendations of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport?

Mr. Mandelson: The initial draft of the company's corporate plan has already gone, under cover of confidentiality, to the Select Committee. It will duly be published for the House and the public to read.

Millennium Celebrations

31. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan** (Cardiff, West): What proposals he has, through the New Millennium Experience Company, for celebrating the millennium in Scotland, Wales and the English regions. [37439]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company has established 12 national programme offices in the nine regions of England and in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to ensure that the millennium experience programme of UK-wide events and activities running before and during 2000 offers as many opportunities as possible for people across the country to take an active part. In addition, the company's 12 local offices will provide a one-stop shop source of information about how to take part in the millennium festival programme which will run during 2000.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply, as one just about old enough to remember with great fondness the 1951 festival of Britain, both on the south bank and all the events in my home village of Radyr, which I now have the honour of representing. Does he agree that, while Greenwich will be essentially regarded as an urban festival, matters such as improving access to the countryside for 2000 and beyond are important? For many of us, the right to roam is as important as the right to dome, if not more so.

Mr. Mandelson: I very much share my hon. Friend's sentiment. It is important that, in formulating ideas and, plans for locally based, do-it-yourself millennium celebrations and festivals, the matching funds from the millennium festival fund are sought by rural as well as suburban and urban areas. I hope that that will be the case. I shall ensure that the offices of the New Millennium Experience Company, which administers the millennium festival fund, seek to encourage and look kindly upon any such applications from local groups and organisations in rural areas.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Over the recess, I met Mr. Stephen Martin of Virtex, which runs virtual reality systems that would allow the millennium dome to be enjoyed by every citizen in the country who has access to the internet. That project was encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), but the company has now learnt from a reliable source that a Japanese system might have been chosen. Why is that?

Mr. Mandelson: I shall, of course, look into the matter; I have no detailed information on it at my fingertips. Wherever possible, we seek to make sure that the supplies for the dome, both for its construction and for its contents, come from British companies. If British companies have failed to compete successfully on this occasion, I very much regret that. However, as I said, I shall inquire with the company and see what the facts of the matter are.

Spirit Zone

32. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** (South-West Surrey): What representations he has received about the use of the term "spirit zone". [37440]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company's working title for the zone, which aims to explore the values that underpin our society and how they are expressed through faith and belief, is spirit level. The New Millennium Experience Company has received two representations about the use of the term "spirit level" arising from the company's continuing consultations with the Lambeth group on the content of the zone.

Mrs. Bottomley: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Christians and other faith groups had their worst fears confirmed when the contents of the dome were launched at The People's Palace, the same place where Labour celebrated its victory? Their fear is that the Government are exploiting the dome for party political purposes. The term "spirit level" is an insult to the Christian faith and to other religions, and sounds more like a place where Mystic Meg should hang out.

Mr. Mandelson: That is rich coming from the right hon. Lady, the leader of whose party said recently that he would rather take a walk than go to church.

Northern Ireland (Belfast Agreement)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement, which the House has wanted to hear for many years, on the succesful conclusion of the multi-party talks in Belfast.

It is my privilege to be able to tell the House that a comprehensive political agreement was reached late in the afternoon of 10 April—Good Friday. The text has been published as Cm 3883. A copy is being sent to every home in Northern Ireland. I am very grateful to the Post Office for providing this service at business rate, so that people across Northern Ireland have a chance to study the agreement in detail.

The Government's main aim throughout these negotiations has been to secure political stability and lasting peace for all the people of Northern Ireland. As a result of what is being called the Good Friday agreement, that goal is now in sight.

This is a unique agreement born of a unique set of negotiations that involved Unionists, nationalists, republicans and loyalists around the same talks table. This is a situation in which, although compromises have been made, everyone can be a winner. Everyone's political and cultural identity is respected and protected by this deal. Northern Ireland politics, for so long, has been seen as a zero sum game. This agreement demonstrates the potential for the people of Northern Ireland to move beyond that, into a new type of politics in which everyone can gain. This agreement represents a sensible, fair and workable way forward for both communities.

I should like to pay a particular tribute today to the negotiating teams of all the parties involved. I should also like to pay tribute to a group who, though often vilified, have worked for many years to bring about this agreement, often at personal risk to themselves and their families—the civil servants in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

It is important, when we are talking about all the positive developments, that at the same time we do not lose sight of the terrible price that has been paid by the victims of violence and their families. No amount of progress in the search for lasting peace will bring back those loved ones who have been lost, or take away the pain felt, day in and day out, by their families. I hope that Ken Bloomfield's victims commission, which we have set up and which I hope will report later this month, will provide us with some practical suggestions as to how we can best recognise the suffering endured by the victims of violence and their families.

Many of those families say to me similar words to those that are actually printed in the agreement:

"the achievement of a peaceful and just society would be the true memorial to the victims of violence."

The main elements in the agreement are as follows. First, on constitutional issues, the British and Irish Governments have formally resolved our historical differences through the general and future acceptance of the principle of consent, which means that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and will stay that way for as long as that is the wish of a majority of people who live there; and it means that, if the people of Northern Ireland were formally to consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, the Government of the day would bring forward proposals, in consultation with the Irish Government, to give effect to that wish.

Under the agreement, the Irish Government will bring forward proposals to amend the Irish constitution to bring it into line with this understanding, and the necessary changes will also be made to the British constitutional legislation.

The second part of the agreement says that there will be greater democratic accountability in Northern Ireland through the devolution of a wide range of executive and legislative powers to a Northern Ireland assembly. In the assembly, the posts of executive authority will be shared out on a proportional basis, and safeguards will be in place to protect the interests of both the communities.

Thirdly, there will be a north-south ministerial council, which will bring together those with executive authority, north and south, to work together by agreement on matters of mutual interest. Those participating on the council will be mandated by, and remain accountable to, the assembly and to the Irish Parliament; and at least six "implementation bodies" will be identified within the next six months to put decisions taken by the council into effect, either on a cross-border or all-island basis, in specified areas. More such bodies or mechanisms may be established by agreement between the two sides, north and south.

Fourthly, there will be a British-Irish council, to bring together our two Governments, and representatives of devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and from the Channel Islands and Isle of Man. This development builds on the Government's radical programme for constitutional reform.

Fifthly, there will be a new British-Irish agreement to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. This will be brought into effect as soon as the other elements of the deal are in place.

The British-Irish agreement sets out the new shared understanding on constitutional matters. It also creates a new British-Irish intergovernmental conference, which will deal with all bilateral issues between the two Governments. In recognition of the Irish Government's special interest in relation to Northern Ireland, there will continue, as now, to be regular meetings between myself and the Irish Foreign Minister. However, in future, relevant executive Members of the Northern Ireland assembly will also be involved in those meetings, to discuss non-devolved issues that arise in relation to Northern Ireland.

In addition, the existing joint Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield will close before the end of this year.

The agreement also includes a range of measures to enhance the proper protection of basic human rights. It will include a new independent human rights commission in Northern Ireland, which is there to consult and advise on the scope for defining rights supplementary to those in the European convention on human rights, which the Government are in the process of incorporating into United Kingdom law.

There is also public consultation under way about the proposals in our "Partnership for Equality" White Paper. Subject to that consultation, those proposals—including the establishment of a powerful new equality

commission—are reflected in the agreement, along with a number of other proposals to encourage parity of esteem between the two main political and cultural traditions.

Finally, the agreement looks ahead to the creation of a normal and peaceful society in Northern Ireland. It establishes a clear process of the decommissioning of illegal weapons that can start forthwith, and a commitment by all the parties to work constructively in good faith with the independent commission, and to use any influence they have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons within two years of the referendum. It commits both Governments to reducing the profile of security measures and emergency legislation as the threat to peace and good order reduces.

There will also be an independent commission to consider what policing service would be appropriate in a Northern Ireland free from the threat of terrorist violence, and would be capable of fully commanding the support of both communities. There will be a parallel review of the criminal justice system.

The agreement also commits both Governments to put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners. Let me be clear: this is not an easy issue for anyone, but it is an indispensable part of this agreement. For our part, the British Government will establish an independent sentence review body to look at each prisoner on a case-by-case basis to determine their eligibility for release.

Most eligible prisoners will qualify for release on licence within two years. If the circumstances allow, the remainder will be released at that point. It must be emphasised, however, that this time frame is variable, depending on the degree of genuine commitment to peace.

Prisoners associated with groups that do not maintain a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not qualify. Prisoners who do qualify will be released on licence and returned to prison if they engage in any further terrorist activity. These are crucial safeguards, and a briefing note giving more detail of the specifics of the proposed arrangement has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

This agreement was made possible by the efforts of many people—most of all by the leaders of the political parties involved in the negotiations. The House will, I am sure, wish to join me in paying tribute also to the exceptional chairmanship skills of the former Senator, George Mitchell, and his two assistants, the former Prime Minister of Finland, Harri Holkeri, and Sir John de Chastelain.

No less crucial was the constant support and the direct involvement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, particularly over the last few crucial days of the negotiations. His efforts were matched by those of the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, who rose above the personal tragedy of his mother's death to play an equally decisive role.

Hon. Members will also appreciate the enormous value of having a broad political consensus in support of the talks process, both here at Westminster and in the Irish parliament. I should like to pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Members for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), and to Lord Mayhew and his colleague the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram).

Equally, successive Irish Prime Ministers and Ministers for Foreign Affairs in the Republic have played a crucial role. In addition, I should like briefly to thank President Clinton, who has been an invaluable support during the talks process. I could go on—many other Governments and people have been involved, including the European Union. All of them have made an incredible difference, but I just thought it important to put our appreciation on record.

I am laying an order today setting 22 May as the date for the referendum. A parallel referendum will take place in the Republic of Ireland on the same day. If both are successful, elections should be held to the new Northern Ireland Assembly before the end of June. Following the elections, the Assembly and the North-South Ministerial Council would operate in shadow mode, making the necessary preparations, until the main implementing legislation, which I intend to introduce as soon as possible, has been enacted and brought into effect.

The agreement reached on Good Friday is, I believe, a significant turning point in the history of Northern Ireland, but let us have no illusions. It will take a long time to repair the physical and the emotional damage of the past and bring about a real sense of reconciliation and partnership. The people there have suffered a great deal of hardship and pain. To their strength we must give all our support in the weeks and months ahead.

There will be pressures on all sides to bring the agreement down. The best way that we can help to fight those pressures is to give the agreement the overwhelming support of the House, and to give the people of Northern Ireland the chance to choose the future, not the past, in which to live. In the end, the decisions rest with the people of Northern Ireland. The choice is theirs.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I congratulate the Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues on achieving an agreement between the political parties and the two Governments. May I particularly praise the sensitive and understanding chairmanship of Senator Mitchell and his colleagues, which in no small measure resulted in the agreement.

I am grateful to the Secretary of State for acknowledging the significant contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), his Secretary of State, Lord Mayhew, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), all of whom worked tirelessly to achieve a lasting settlement in the Province, and without whose efforts we would not have heard the statement today.

The Conservative party warmly welcomes the agreement, but recognises that it is not an end in itself. It will not bring peace overnight, but it gives us the opportunity to build a lasting peace underpinned by stable political institutions that have the allegiance, and respect the rights and traditions, of all parts of the community.

For all of us, there are aspects of the agreement that do not sit comfortably with our aspirations and beliefs. Nevertheless, we believe that the agreement represents the best way forward for Northern Ireland. The Conservative and Unionist party strongly endorses the conclusion of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that the agreement strengthens the Union. The Act of Union remains firmly in place, while the Irish territorial claim is

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

to be abandoned. At the same time, the agreement recognises the legitimate aspirations and interests of the nationalist community.

I have some questions for the Secretary of State relating to matters that are of legitimate concern not just on these Benches, but particularly in the Province. First, does she accept that it is highly likely that splinter groups could seek to bring down the agreement by the use of force? The Continuity Army Council, Republican Sinn Fein and the 32 County Sovereignty Committee remain implacably opposed to the agreement, as does the Loyalist Volunteer Force. Will she confirm that no security measures will be relaxed prematurely that cannot be reversed very quickly?

Secondly, we are naturally concerned about the lack of progress on decommissioning terrorist weapons. Will the Secretary of State confirm that no member of the new assembly will be appointed a Minister until his paramilitary associates have engaged in substantial decommissioning? Can that be incorporated in the forthcoming legislation, along the lines of the letter that the Prime Minister sent to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann?

Will the Secretary of State assure the House that there will be no early release of prisoners if decommissioning is not well under way? Can she allay fears in the Province by promising today that prisoners will not be released early if their parliamentary associates resume violence in any shape or form, and that, in the case of those released, their licence will be revoked if such violence resumes? Will she reconsider the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright in the light of these developments?

Thirdly, does the Secretary of State agree that it is the brave men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supported by the armed forces, who have stood between the rule of law and anarchy for the past 30 years? The RUC deserves our continuing praise and support. Therefore, will the Secretary of State confirm that any changes in policing will be made only after widespread consultation, on the basis of the broadest possible consensus?

Finally, will the Secretary of State accept that we are pleased that the Prime Minister has today taken up the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that the two of them, together with the leader of the Liberal Democrats, should speak together on a "yes" platform during the forthcoming referendum?

This is as inclusive an agreement as is ever likely to be achieved. It is a crucial development in the history of Northern Ireland, upon which we hope all sides can build. The next step is to secure an overwhelming yes vote on both sides of the border in the referendum on 22 May. After all the horror, disappointments and false dawns of the past 30 years, this is perhaps the best opportunity that we shall ever have to secure a new beginning for Northern Ireland. Let no one be in any doubt that we in the Conservative party will do all in our power to ensure its success.

Marjorie Mowlam: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's last point, yes, I welcome the cross-party support for the referendum. I make it clear that we are not financing one side over the other. That fact must be put on record, as other hon. Members have raised that point. We are providing free leaflets to every house on behalf of all parties that received support in the May 1996 elections, whether they are campaigning for a yes or a no vote. There will be no imbalance for the parties within Northern Ireland.

I have no difficulty in supporting the tribute that the hon. Gentleman paid to the RUC. I have stated on many occasions that the RUC has demonstrated enormous bravery over the past 30 years. As I said earlier, when praising the RUC, we must not forget the families and friends who are living without loved ones or with very injured members of that force. It is important to remember that point, and I am very pleased to put it on record.

No one is seeking change unless there is a peaceful situation. We know that the first job of any Government is to ensure the security of the people they govern. We have 13,000 police and 17,000 troops in Northern Ireland. During past ceasefires, we and the previous Government de-escalated in response to that situation. However, we were flexible enough to return to our former position when the situation demanded it—we have no difficulties on that front.

I know that the police in Northern Ireland will, after consultation, want to work as a police force in a normal society that is not faced with terrorism. The police want to represent the whole Northern Ireland community, in both make-up and behaviour. That is the crucial point to remember.

As to the early release of prisoners, I hope that I made it clear to the hon. Gentleman that several security safeguards are built into the agreement. I am sure that he and his colleagues understand that, according to the nature of the agreement, several things must happen in parallel in order to build confidence. That has always been the situation, whether it be decommissioning, the release of prisoners, changes to the police force or normal acts of governance.

We have just announced assistance of £33 million in addition to the school building programme in Northern Ireland. Introducing such measures alongside one another is crucial to normalising the situation in the long run.

The hon. Gentleman knows that it is difficult for me to say a lot about Fisher and Wright, as, like my predecessors, I have a semi-judicial role in that decision. As Mr. Fisher and Mr. Wright were convicted of scheduled offences, they will be able to benefit from the review and from any other proposals that are on the table. As the hon. Gentleman knows, their cases are up for review again in autumn this year.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I would like to see decommissioning tomorrow. I would like it to happen forthwith, as the Prime Minister said at the end of the week of the talks, and as we have said on numerous occasions. The mechanisms that will make decommissioning possible are in place. The Prime Minister's letter to which the hon. Gentleman referred said not only that decommissioning should start immediately but that he would like to put in place mechanisms to enable a review some months into the process, to ensure that all the machinery was working. It is built and structured in such a way in the agreement that it represents mutually assured progress or mutually assured destruction. That is why I am hopeful, and that is why I believe that the decommissioning that we would all like to see is crucial.

The hon. Gentleman asked, in the context of decommissioning, whether Ministers would be able to serve. It is clearly stated in the agreement that Ministers have to sign up to the principles of a democratic and peaceful way forward. That is a crucial step for anyone who seeks to be a Minister in the assembly.

Built into the agreement is a cross-community mechanism. If people are not fulfilling their responsibilities and commitments in the assembly, there can be sufficient cross-community support within it to ensure that ministerial jobs can be withheld from those concerned. A review mechanism will be implemented six months in, to ensure that all the bits of the process are working.

The hon. Gentleman's first point was about splinter groups. As he will be aware, they have been a continual problem during the talks process. The Loyalist Volunteer Force, the Continuity IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army have been a particular problem. They will not go away after what I hope will be a successful referendum vote. They will still be there. It is a credit to the people of Northern Ireland and to the parties to have kept going when there are people there murdering, maiming and trying to destabilise the best chance they have not to go back to the past but to live for the future.

I hope that we get a good enough vote in the referendum. I have said that we are not campaigning one way or the other, but I have not worked for a year to get a no vote. I think that a positive yes vote in the north and the south is the biggest message that we can give the groups to which I have referred. That message is that they have no future with their present behaviour in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Secretary of State will have received enough plaudits, well justified and well deserved, from enough quarters not to need me to add to them.

Marjorie Mowlam: Do, please.

Mr. Ashdown: I suppose that one can never get too many plaudits.

As someone who is proud to call himself a Northern Irishman—born and brought up in the north of a divided family, and having served on the streets of Northern Ireland as a soldier—I can say that the right hon. Lady, the Prime Minister and everyone else who has contributed to the agreement gave me, a week ago last Friday, the best day that I have had since I was elected to this place 15 years ago. It was probably the best day for me for the past 30 years, since the troubles started.

Of course I congratulate the Secretary of State. Her determination to do things differently, even against opposition and criticism, and the Prime Minister's determination not to accept defeat in the negotiations, were two significant contributions of a great number which the right hon. Lady listed.

There was the vision of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), without which, I suspect, the process would never have started. There was the courage of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), without which, I suspect, the agreement would not have existed, even today. A tremendous contribution was made by the previous Prime Minister. Also involved were the Taoiseach and Senator Mitchell. All those individuals contributed, and I suspect that without any one of them, the success would not be here to be celebrated today.

I shall make three brief points. Surely it is right, as the right hon. Lady did in her statement, to reiterate that we do not have peace; it is merely the opportunity for peace, or the hope for peace. It is the foundation stone upon which peace can be built, but it is now up to the Northern Irish people to build upon it.

Secondly, is it not the case that the first major building block in the peace process comes with the referendums? All those who wish the process success can assist by obtaining the most decisive yes vote, both in the north of Ireland and in the Republic, in the two key referendums. If—if—it is the case that I or anyone else goes over to the north of Ireland to campaign on that basis and to assist in the process, I shall be happy to play that role. However, that involvement must be determined on whether it is helpful or not. This is an issue not of ceremony but of practical assistance.

Thirdly, in addition to decommissioning, is it not the case that other activity on the part of those who wish to see a success must make sure that words are followed by actions? Actions are necessary to reassure both sides. One of the absolutely crucial actions is the ending of paramilitary beatings. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it would be as unacceptable for them to continue as it would be for the private armies that have done Northern Ireland so much damage in the past to continue?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I shall be quick; I do not disagree with a thing he says, and in the interests of other hon. Members who want to speak, I shall only say, "Thank you for your support, and thank you for the support of your party."

Mr. John Hume (Foyle) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hume: May I place on record our deep appreciation for the detailed work that the Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues have done in arriving at this agreement? I am sure that, in so doing, I speak for the vast majority of the people of both sections of our community.

May I join her in thanking the Prime Minister for the priority that he gave to the greatest human problem facing the House? The fact that he gave it such priority gave enormous encouragement to the people at grass-roots level, who have suffered from this problem and strengthened the peace process enormously. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for so doing.

I also pay tribute, and express deep gratitude, to the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and his colleagues, because they worked hard to help to lay the foundations for the process. I express my deep appreciation to him and to other hon. Members who are in the Chamber. I include in that the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), because, when the history is written—I know a bit about the history of this process—his role and public statements will be seen to have laid a major foundation. I say to him, "Thank you." I add to that our thanks to the leader of the

[Mr. Hume]

Liberal Democrats, because he has been consistent in his total support for a common-sense approach to this problem.

It is welcome that the agreement will put in place institutions which will give no victory to either side in our community, but which instead will create circumstances that respect the identities of both sections of our community, in which they could work together in their common interests.

I have no doubt from my experience that, given the massive international good will that there has been towards the agreement, real politics will take over once we start working together and leave our quarrel behind us. Harnessing that international support and interest will transform our economy, and give hope to our young people, so that the next century will be the first in our island history in which there will be no killings on our streets and no emigration of our young to other lands to earn a living.

Marjorie Mowlam: I should like to make two quick responses. First, I put on record my thanks to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who fought long and hard on this issue when it was not popular, which should be remembered by those who came along when it became more popular.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman has brought something to the process over the years which is difficult to achieve in Northern Ireland—flexibility with words, which has helped tremendously. As I was preparing my statement, I picked out a phrase that he has used; he said that the future depends on the wishes of the people, not on institutions. The rethinking that he has brought to the process has also helped.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trimble: Without disagreeing with the introductory comments of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), I hope that the right hon. Lady and other hon. Members will forgive me if I do not repeat the thanks to everyone, but merely record my view that, without the actions of the Prime Minister in the last couple of days of the negotiations, no agreement would have been achieved.

I emphasise the right hon. Lady's comment that we should have no illusions. Considerable difficulties lie ahead, and there will no doubt be setbacks. I note with interest her comment that the British and Irish Governments have resolved their historical differences. That is important, because, while there will be developments within the structures that we shall put in place, this must be seen as a settlement, not as a milepost in the direction of some other eventual outcome.

On that point, is the right hon. Lady not concerned about the way in which Sinn Fein is acting with regard to this agreement? It has not endorsed the agreement. It says at the moment, if press reports today are to be believed, that, in the referendum, it will campaign in Northern Ireland for a yes, but in the Republic of Ireland for a no, and that, rather than endorse the agreement as a whole, it will attempt to cherry-pick some items of it and to ignore the obligations that it would place on Sinn Fein.

In that respect, does the right hon. Lady agree that it is important that the requirement that parties be committed to peaceful, democratic, non-violent means is not just a few empty words, but a genuine requirement that has to be satisfied before people can move into the Administration? It also underlines the need for the commitments to decommissioning again to be more than the empty words that they have so far been, and that action now is necessary.

With regard to the position on prisoners, as I am sure the right hon. Lady knows, that matter causes very great and very real concern in the community in Northern Ireland. The sentence review body will look at each prisoner on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility for release. I should be grateful if she could give some indication as to the sort of criteria that the review body might be adopting, so that the public have some assurance that the circumstances of individual cases will be considered; the gravity of those cases does need to be taken into account.

In that context, I note that the Irish Government have already said that, irrespective of the release provisions, if people are found guilty of the murder of Garda McCabe, they will not be released. The contrast is bound to be keenly felt when people who have been guilty of murdering policemen in the United Kingdom are released.

May I again press the right hon. Lady on the question of security force prisoners? The case of the two guardsmen was mentioned, and of course I endorse the comments that were made about that by other Members; but there are quite a few security force prisoners, and I think that we should be doing more than just leaving their cases to be considered in the normal way, particularly as among those members of the security forces who are in prison—I think that he is now one of the longest life sentence prisoners—is a man who was unjustly convicted.

There is an innocent man in prison who was unjustly convicted of a murder. He was a member of the security forces, and a wide section of the community believes that, because he was a member of the security forces, he has not been given the sort of generous consideration that others have. The public's concerns on those matters need to be allayed.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the kind remarks about the Prime Minister. I obviously echo them. For those three days, he worked flat out, and I am not sure that many others would have done that. The right hon. Gentleman also worked very hard in those last days to find an accommodation.

I agree completely that we have to bear it in mind that we should have no illusions in the next six months. We thought that it was tough up to Good Friday; we are going to have some tough days in the weeks and months ahead. However, we are starting from a different base. We are starting from the base of an accommodation based on consent, and we have to bear it in mind that the principles of consent and fairness that have governed us until now are in place in that historic agreement. I think that that is an enormous starting point.

I pick up the right hon. Gentleman's last point, on prisoners. I will, of course, look at individual cases, but I think it best at this point to take note of those. I am not unaware of the cases to which he has referred, but I should like to get the legislation in place first. There is a detailed

brief in the Library, but the details further to that will be available when the legislation, which is being drawn up now, is available to all hon. Members.

May I pick out the main point that the right hon. Gentleman raised about Sinn Fein and its non-endorsement of the agreement? In the talks last week, its members made it clear that they wanted to consult their party before they were prepared to make a definitive statement, but that they would be positive about the agreement. They were, and I think that they have been since then. I feel unable to comment on particular statements in the press—not because I do not always believe what the newspapers say but because I should like to read it for myself first, and get advice on what has been said.

I do not know whether Sinn Fein is going to cherry-pick the agreement, but I do know that most of the parties will, in their heart of hearts, cherry-pick. When we started *n* years ago, people were very far apart. We have reached a compromise on a structure—no one is signing up to 100 per cent., but, on balance, people are saying that it is the best agreement they can think possible, and that therefore they are able to support it.

I am not sure that I can go further than that, but I very much hope that Sinn Fein will join us in campaigning positively for an agreement. We have said all along that we want an inclusive agreement. It is only by inclusivity and bringing people into the process that we are going to stop the violence in the long term.

Finally, I support what was in the Prime Minister's letter, which is the basic position we hold on decommissioning. As we have said, it is an essential step to having a settlement that lasts.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that, when history records the agreement and a yes vote in the referendum, it will be not only the suffering in Northern Ireland that will come to an end but the suffering imposed on the people of the United Kingdom, because war in Ireland has caused great anguish and many casualties in this country, in England and Scotland as well?

I should like to ask one practical question. In annex A, a pledge of office is required for Members of the proposed assembly. When the legislation comes to be drawn up, will the Secretary of State consider whether anyone ready to give that pledge of office would also qualify, if elected, for membership of the House of Commons? It would be very hard if some Ministers in the Assembly were qualified to sit in this House and others were not. As she knows, it is an issue that I have raised many times—indeed, I introduced the Parliamentary Declaration Bill—and one that merits serious consideration when the legislation comes to be drafted.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my right hon. Friend. I agree whole-heartedly with his first point. It is useful to put on record the hard work of people such as Colin Parry from Warrington and Rita Restorick, whose son Stephen was the last man from the Army to be killed. They are people who have suffered on this side of the water, and, alongside the people of Northern Ireland, they have put great effort into making a difference.

On my right hon. Friend's second point, it is a matter best left to the House as a whole, not to me.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is the right hon. Lady aware that this is a very moving occasion for anyone who has had the privilege to hold office in Northern Ireland? I warmly congratulate her and the Prime Minister, and join her, if I may, in congratulating my right hon. Friend the previous Prime Minister and other colleagues who have played such a part in taking the process forward.

The right hon. Lady referred to two people who lost their lives—Private Restorick and one in Warrington—but she will understand that my mind goes back to so many people—those in the security forces and brave non-combatants in both communities—who, by standing for democracy and freedom against terrorism over the years, have made the agreement possible. I congratulate her on the achievement of bringing forward this agreement now.

I know from her remarks that the Secretary of State recognises that this is the end of the beginning, and that the real challenge comes now. There may be an agreement on paper, and an agreement may have been reached in smoke-filled or non-smoking rooms in Stormont, but it is with the hearts and minds of the people, expressed not just in a referendum but in a genuine determination then to make the new possibilities work, that the challenge will lie. I certainly wish her well, and, for my part, I am willing to do anything I can to help the process forward.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I reinforce the point that his service in Northern Ireland was during one of the hardest, toughest times. I pay tribute to him for his service, and to the many people who, as he said, suffered during that time, many of whose names will never be known. When we were working on the late Friday night of the talks, I realised that I had been doing the job for 11 months, but sitting next to me were civil servants who had been doing it for 11 years. We should never forget to keep things in perspective.

I echo the right hon. Gentleman's last point. We can put the structures in place, but, as he rightly said, in the end it will be the people who will make it work or not. It is about trust and respect for each other. We cannot legislate for that—it takes years to build. There is a long haul ahead, but—call me naive—I am still confident that, in the years ahead, the people of Northern Ireland will make it.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): In expressing my sheer delight at my right hon. Friend's achievement, I want also to ask her to bear in mind the principle that parole has always been available throughout the United Kingdom system to allow the early release of prisoners and to recall them if there is any danger of their committing another offence. That principle applies equally to the people in Northern Ireland, whether Unionist or republican, who have misguidedly believed that they could advance their cause through violence. That is the principle by which we should be guided, and the one for which I have argued for many years during this dispute.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for the personal support that he has given me. I echo his last

[Marjorie Mowlam]

point. It is worth putting on the record the fact that, in the 1960s, the Stormont Government released prisoners, so this is not the first time that early release has been considered. Of course, if the remission scheme currently in place was the only scheme on offer, two thirds of prisoners would be out in two years, anyway.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The right hon. Lady well knows that there is an explicit linkage in the agreement between the release of prisoners and the cessation of murder. That is welcome in so far as it goes. However, there is no explicit linkage between decommissioning and the release of prisoners; nor is there an explicit linkage between the appointment of the First Minister, his or her deputy, Chairmen of Committees or Ministers, and decommissioning and the cessation of murder.

Why is that? Are there, perhaps, side agreements or letters of comfort—for example, the letter from the Prime Minister to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)? If so, what are those side agreements, and would the right hon. Lady please put them in the Library of the House?

Marjorie Mowlam: There are no side agreements. The letter from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) is in the public domain—it has already been published. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman want to see any other information? As he knows, I write to many Members of Parliament about Northern Ireland. The letter to which we have referred is the one that I believe to be relevant, and it has been published. There are no side deals, and there is nothing that is not in the public domain.

There is quite consciously no bartering of prisoners for weapons—no link between the two. All along, the Government have believed that that would be an unacceptable bargain to strike. All we have said is that a number of changes are necessary in the context of overall peace being the first step. If we have an overall peace agreement, other things will follow if there is to be change.

Everyone has to change—we have to change, the Irish have to change, and the parties have to change. We all have to adapt and find a future in which we can all live. There are no side deals and no bartering, but the early release of prisoners, changes in the police system, greater equality and a whole host of other things will follow as confidence, respect and trust are built among the people.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I join colleagues in congratulating and thanking all those in this House, previous holders of office and the Irish Government for their efforts in obtaining this agreement—not forgetting the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). I want to claim a massive victory, because I think that the agreement is a massive victory. It is a victory for the political process over violence; of pragmatism over outdated ideologies. Above all, it is a victory of the human spirit, inspired by hope and confidence, over the twin imposters of hatred and bigotry.

I believe that the agreement should not be nit-picked or cherry-picked. I believe that it should not be seen as a victory for either Unionism or nationalism. It is a comprehensive and common-sense set of arrangements that will allow people to be at peace with themselves, at peace with others, and united in the common purpose of resolving our differences only by agreement, only by consent and only through working together to lay to rest the ghosts that have divided us for so long.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I echo his support for the Ministers who are seated on either side of me, who have done a lot of the hard slog to get us here.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The right hon. Lady deserves the praise she has received. She picked up the baton from the Conservative Government and twirled it, very successfully, with a style that was very much her own.

This agreement is very much in line with the principles which have held together the United Kingdom—democratic processes, consent and discussion. It is very important that the people of Northern Ireland, themselves and alone, have an opportunity to take a view on the outcome of the agreement and whether they wish to adopt it. Does she agree that we should warn those who wish to oppose the agreement that they should consider carefully the grounds on which they oppose it? Does she agree that those who wish to be part of the United Kingdom should remember that the rest of the United Kingdom would like a democratic future for Northern Ireland on the basis of the agreement?

Marjorie Mowlam: Frighteningly, I agree with everything the hon. Gentleman says, apart from his remark about twirling my baton—the marching season is not yet with us. Ultimately, the matter is in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland, and those who oppose the agreement should think hard about what the rest of the United Kingdom would like. They should consider also their opposition to it, because I should like to know their alternative—apart from going back to the dark days.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I offer my thanks and congratulations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on her remarkably fine performance in that difficult office. I also offer my sincere thanks to my hon. Friends in the SDLP, and to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who has shown remarkable courage in recent days. We should thank also President Bill Clinton for his helpful contributions, although I believe that he should defer his visit until after 22 May.

It is my view that Scots Guardsmen Fisher and Wright should be given an early transfer to a prison in Scotland if, and only if, that is their wish. They committed an horrendous crime, but these two young infantrymen should be returned to Scotland. I hope that, in the near future, they will be released to their families and communities under licence.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his positive comments. A transfer for Fisher and Wright is available—all they have to do is apply. They have not done so yet.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Has any amnesty been offered against future prosecution of

crimes of violence in Northern Ireland? Does the right hon. Lady appreciate the profound disquiet—indeed, revulsion—which will have been aroused in the hearts and minds of all those who care about the impartiality and independence of justice by the fact that certain selective criminals should be offered premature releases as a result of the agreement? There are no political prisoners in this country. There are merely prisoners who have been convicted of greater or lesser crimes. The right hon. Lady is proposing the release of some prisoners convicted of the worst crimes.

What kind of signal does that send for the future—"If you kill one man, woman or child, you are a murderer, but if you kill enough people, you can negotiate a collective amnesty with the British Government"? What signal does that send to those who are in prison for lesser offences? Have they made a mistake by not associating themselves with some terrorist organisation? Does the right hon. Lady not appreciate the dangers of introducing into this country arbitrary justice and the politicisation of justice, which are the abnegation of justice itself?

Marjorie Mowlam: In response to the hon. Gentleman's first question, I tell him that there is no amnesty, collective or individual—that is not on the cards. He is entitled to his view, but it is not shared by the Government or those on the Conservative Front Bench.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In welcoming this splendid agreement, which represents the best possible future for Northern Ireland, should we not record—especially given the hostile question that has just been asked—that, during more than 25 years of sustained terrorism, neither the British public, in Northern Ireland or on the mainland, or the House wavered for a moment in dealing with terrorism? We have refused to give in to terrorism, and have always insisted that democracy should triumph. Should not that be a warning to future terrorist groups, who may believe that they can undermine the agreement or the yes vote for which we all hope?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment, with which I agree whole-heartedly. Labour Members, particularly my hon. Friend, have never been soft on terrorism—we have made our position clear time and again. The measures will not apply to anyone convicted after 10 April. We have put in place clear and specific regulations, and I think that we have dealt with the matter straightforwardly, honestly and up front.

There will be disagreements—some people will find the terms of the agreement distasteful, as the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) suggested. I say to those people that, in these difficult times, I have received more letters and phone calls from people who have lost family in the troubles, saying, "Yes, maybe we find it difficult, but this is our best chance to prevent other families from going through what we have been through. If that is the case, you should continue to do what you are doing."

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Secretary of State turn her mind to the issue of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright? Many hon. Members do not accept that their conviction was safe or proper—and if we have to swallow our distaste at the early release of terrorist murderers to sustain the agreement, Guardsmen Fisher and Wright should be released without delay.

Marjorie Mowlam: I have explained the procedure to the House, and I think it best to leave it at that.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): As a strong supporter of Northern Ireland's position in the United Kingdom, may I welcome the agreement? I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister, and I particularly congratulate the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who I believe has played a very courageous role—without him, we would not be where we are.

I urge my right hon. Friend to listen carefully to the 99 per cent. of people in Northern Ireland who are law-abiding, decent citizens; they find it very difficult to understand the release of prisoners. I think that they will accept it, but the issue must be handled very carefully—we must be as open and transparent as possible about the prisoners who will be released.

This issue could prevent the agreement from being successful, although I hope that it will not, and that the people of Northern Ireland will support the agreement. Nevertheless, I urge my right hon. Friend to treat the matter carefully, and to work as closely as possible with all the political parties, especially those constitutional parties that have campaigned so long and hard on the issue.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution, and I echo her comments about the right hon. Member for Upper Bann. I acknowledge her position, which was not always popular in the party in opposition—however, she stood by it, and fought her corner hard, for which I respect her.

I do not in the least under-estimate the prisoner issue. It was included in the agreement as part of an overall settlement. The parties agreed to it—some unhappily, others more happily. I accept that people in Northern Ireland and here find the matter difficult, but, if one asks, "This is part of an overall settlement—should we do it?", the number of people who want us to proceed doubles. We must put the matter in context. No one wants to be the one standing here doing it, but most people accept that it is part of what a settlement will look like.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I recognise that, in the Secretary of State's words, there is a flexibility in the use of words in Northern Ireland—perhaps the most flexible phrase is "confidence-building measures". The terrorist groups see the release of their criminals as a confidence-building measure, but does the Secretary of State share my deep concern—and that expressed by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey)—that the 99 per cent. of people who are the decent, law-abiding majority will not have their confidence built by the early release of some of the worst criminals in society, especially if arsenals of weapons are still available in Northern Ireland, and measures are taken that may damage the effectiveness of one of Britain's greatest and bravest police forces, the RUC?

Marjorie Mowlam: I say to the right hon. Gentleman, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall

[Marjorie Mowlam]

(Kate Hoey), that I accept that, for many people, this is a difficult issue. They are faced with building confidence, which means taking the violence off Northern Ireland's streets and not returning to history and the violence that it brings. On balance, and given time, even those who have suffered most think that it is worth doing. They do not want to be the people who do it, but they think that, in the end, it is worth doing. The referendum will be a chance for them to make their voices heard—it is there for people to voice that concern.

The judgment is difficult. Do we buy a package with which we do not agree 100 per cent., but which in the end has a chance to bring peace and save lives that might be lost in the years ahead? That is the judgment that people will have to make, and, given the option of preventing other people from going through what they have gone through, people will make that call. It is up to them, and it is not easy, but, as I have said, we have to look at the issue in the context of the fact that two thirds of these people would be out in two years, anyway. We are talking about 400 prisoners. Faced with that, and with the history of the past 30 years, let us make the choice.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I assure my right hon. Friend that she has the whole-hearted support not only of the House, but, judging from the phone calls that I have received from my constituents in Luton, which she visited a year ago, overwhelming public support and a great deal of emotional support for the settlement. Many of my constituents and hon. Members welcome her earlier emphasis on fairness and opportunity for all. Could she clarify her response to the report by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, and say how its recommendations might be integrated in a final settlement in Northern Ireland?

Marjorie Mowlam: The question of fairness and justice and the SACHR report and equality is outlined in some detail in the agreement. It refers to our efforts to put matters on a statutory footing after the consultation in which we are currently engaged. The results of the consultation will form part of the final agreement.

When we have listened to people's views, we shall put on a statutory basis within the public service the obligation to bring about equality of opportunity in public services across the board in goods and services. An equality commission will set the objectives and carry out monitoring, and a host of measures will be attempted alongside targeting social need and Labour's new deal proposals to try to get to the long-term unemployed. They include twice as many Catholics as Protestants, but there are many unemployed male Protestants over the age of 40. We have particular projects in mind to try to address that matter, because that too is part of an overall accommodation.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I too congratulate the Secretary of State on this negotiating success, which will be widely welcomed throughout the United Kingdom and for which she as an individual deserves, and seems to have received, immense personal credit. Is she able to confirm that the independent body charged with the review of sentences will be free from lobbying campaigns by one side or the other, by interested parties or by the British or Irish Governments?

Marjorie Mowlam: I have made it clear that the body will be independent. We shall appoint people to that end, and it, like the Parades Commission, will not be open to lobbying from any source.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and I congratulate her and her team on everything that has happened so far. As she says, we are at the starting point, and the next weeks will be vital. I hope that all hon. Members, regardless of party, will support the yes campaign.

On the vexed question of the release of prisoners, my right hon. Friend will know that I was involved in the case of Private Lee Clegg. I was exposed to the horrendous problems caused by the divide in Northern Ireland, and to the tremendous sensitivities about the release of prisoners. When the independent review board considers prisoner releases, I hope that it will be truly independent, and will acknowledge the sense of injustice on both sides of the divide in some very important cases.

Marjorie Mowlam: I acknowledge the work that my hon. Friend has done on the issue, and I hear what he says.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Like the Secretary of State, I hope that there will be a massive yes vote, but I strongly endorse the cautionary words of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) about prisoner releases. I draw the attention of the House to point 2 in the section on prisoners on page 25 of the agreement, which says:

"Prisoners affiliated to organisations which have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not benefit from the arrangements. The situation in this regard will be kept under review."

That makes it clear that prisoners will not be released on licence if their organisations continue to kill; but will they be recalled from release on licence if their organisations, rather than they themselves, resume killing?

Marjorie Mowlam: We made it clear in the statement, I hope, that individuals who are let out on licence will be recalled if they return to violence, and that organisations not on ceasefire will not be eligible. More detailed legislation is still being worked on for cases such as the hon. Gentleman mentioned. This week we shall lay a order for the referendum and an elections Bill, and legislation for the release of prisoners will be introduced in due course. We said that we would consult the parties and others on the question, and we shall certainly honour that pledge.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend and all the parties involved in this courageous settlement. When framing the legislation, will she consider whether it will be possible to avoid by-elections in the new assembly by using a proportional representation system that will allow any vacancy that occurs to be filled by the party that held the seat previously?

That is an important and sensitive matter, because, in the fragile incubation period of the new executive and the new assembly, with the apportionment of committees and

portfolios, there should be no possibility of a disruption in the arithmetic, allowing malevolent people to campaign and screw up the settlement, as happened at the time of Sunningdale. It would be legitimate, in the democratic process, to have legislation that avoided by-elections in the formative years of the new Assembly and executive.

Marjorie Mowlam: That is an interesting point, well worthy of consideration. I hope that we can consider such detail on Wednesday.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Following the comments of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), will the Secretary of State return to the issue of Sinn Fein and its attitude? Sinn Fein has had every opportunity to endorse the agreement. Does she agree that it is stalling in order to have time to assess how far down the road towards a united Ireland the agreement will take it? Was not she chilled by the words of Sinn Fein's president? No sooner had he said, "Well done, David," than he was commending the work of the IRA, and saying that it had not been defeated by the agreement.

Marjorie Mowlam: I am not responsible for what other folk say. As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman seems out of tune with his party's Front-Bench spokesmen. Sinn Fein representatives said that they would hold consultations with their party, and I assume that that is what they are doing. There is not much that I can do about it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Albeit that my right hon. Friend claims to have explained the procedures to the House and says that she is acting in a semi-judicial capacity, are not the cases of Fisher and Wright fundamentally different, in that those two young men were sent there by us on green Benches?

How can the Government be satisfied with the judges' conclusion that Fisher and Wright had no reason to feel that they were in danger? Was it not taken into account that their colleague, Guardsman Shackleton, was shot dead on the very same streets only a few weeks before? Having read the transcript of the trial, as I have done, does she not think that Fisher and Wright might have instantaneously understood the danger of coffee jar bombs and the whole "Come on!" trap scenario? Many ex-servicemen and, indeed, national servicemen, like me, feel, "There but for the grace of God went we!"

Marjorie Mowlam: I know how strongly a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House feel about this issue. I am afraid that all I can say in response, with a semi-judicial hat on, is that I have explained the procedures. Fisher and Wright were tried in court, and they had an appeal. As I said, we will certainly consider the issue.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): By linking the release of a prisoner to participation in a ceasefire by a particular faction, are we not establishing a dreadful principle—that there is a separate category of political crime?

Marjorie Mowlam: There is not a direct linkage. We are taking it as part of an overall peace settlement. As hon. Members have said, that has happened in other parts of the world, and it is the way to try to find a new future for Northern Ireland.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On that point, many hon. Members have made crude linkages between prisoners and decommissioning. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is better for the process to be seen as more complex, and to see the release of prisoners in the context of rehabilitation of individuals and the whole community, and decommissioning in the context of the demilitarisation of the whole of the Six Counties? Is it not better that Sinn Fein should go through a thorough consultation process, so that its leadership has the overwhelming support of its membership for its position on the agreement?

Marjorie Mowlam: What we are after achieving is a normal society for everyone in Northern Ireland, which is what we are trying to do. On the prisoner issue, the proposed new tariff will result in two thirds being let out within two years—the present tariff is a half. We are suggesting that remission level with a date two years down the line.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): First, can I attach myself to the congratulations to my right hon. Friend and her team, and particularly to say how proud we in Scotland are of our two Ministers from Scotland? Does she accept that, although we did not suffer in Scotland from bombing violence, we have been scarred deeply by the sectarianism which has plagued our community, because of the inability to move on the Northern Ireland question?

As we move forward on this path to reconciliation, my right hon. Friend will recall that I visited and spoke to people in Northern Ireland during the period of opposition, and the one word that came up continually was "intimidation". I have looked in the document under "Policing", and I do not see that word mentioned.

Can my right hon. Friend give us some reassurance that consultation and discussions will take place, so that the sub-structure to the paramilitary organisations, which are running a rule of law within their own community outwith the British rule of law, will be dismantled at the same time as decommissioning and the dismantling of paramilitarism?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend. We will be attempting, in response to the police, to change the present situation in which some areas of Northern Ireland are no-go areas, which is not satisfactory either for the police or for the local community. To change that situation, we will need trust and confidence building, and the best way to get those is to get a peace settlement so that the changes that we began to see in the police force under the last ceasefire begin to take place.

The best way to change the situation to which my hon. Friend referred is to get the representation of people across the communities. That is the point, and at the moment it is not possible. It will become so only with overall change, and through the whole peace process.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I was an 11-year-old schoolboy in Belfast when the troubles

[Mr. Brian White]

started, and I never thought that I would see what happened on Good Friday. History has been mentioned, and everyone in Ulster remembers their history selectively. I remember the Sunningdale agreement and what happened after it, when the Ulster Workers Council strike brought it down. Those voices have not gone away, although they are not here today.

I urge my right hon. Friend not merely to stand on the sidelines and put the agreement to the people, but to rebut and refute every allegation that parties outside the agreement make. I urge her to take on those people and make the argument for the agreement, as that is the only hope for the future of Northern Ireland. If we do not take this opportunity, I do not think that we will see another day like Good Friday in another generation. I urge my right hon. Friend to take on those voices of unreason, and rebut every argument they make.

Marjorie Mowlam: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and perhaps I was not completely clear earlier. Of course, when people say daft and nonsensical things, I will disagree—they are just not here for me to disagree with them this afternoon.

The precedents are there, and it is difficult in Northern Ireland. The only reason that I am being reticent is because it is about trust and confidence, and we do not build those by telling people what to do. They will happen in their communities when people read the document, which is what I implore everyone in Northern Ireland to do—to make up their own minds.

We will not necessarily achieve the sort of community that will build for the future itself, which is the way that it will happen, by going in in busloads and telling people how to behave. That is not the way to build community support. Enough voices in Northern Ireland are disagreeing.

I have faith in those who want to build a safer, more positive and stable future, where economic growth could be phenomenal and the day-to-day issues that affect people's lives, such as health, education and jobs, will begin to change, as my hon. Friend will know, as he grew up there. We are not going to be wimpish about it, but I have one word of caution—it is their choice, not ours.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I welcome the right hon. Lady's comments, and congratulate her on what she has achieved. One matter troubles me from what I have heard. Under the system under which early release will be achieved, the fact that particular organisations have announced that they do not support violence will be taken into account in allowing prisoners early release. How will she ensure that prisoners held for terrorist offences who are members of organisations that have not signed up to the agreement, or that may denounce it, do not consider themselves unfairly penalised by not being released and not having their cases considered?

Marjorie Mowlam: "Tough" is, I think, the short answer to that. If they do not sign up to the ceasefire, then they remain where they are.

To restructure the question and deal with a serious difficulty, a slightly harder issue to deal with is if they suddenly wake up one morning and say, "Whoops, I'm no longer a member of INLA, I've just joined PIRA." Those are difficult questions, which is why we are putting in place an independent body to assess them case by case, so that, when it does get difficult—it is problematic—the system is not used and abused. That is why we have been careful in the paper in the Library, and will be careful in the further details that will be provided, to ensure that it is not abused.

Business of the House

4.48 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): Following the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I should like to make a short business statement.

The business for Wednesday 22 April will now be as follows:

Proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill; followed by motions on the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Referendum) Order, and the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order.

The business previously announced for that day will be taken at a later date. The business for the remainder of this week will be as previously announced.

The House may also wish to know that, subject to discussions through the usual channels, it is proposed that the business for Monday 27 April, Tuesday 28 April and Wednesday 29 April will be progress in Committee on the Finance (No. 2) Bill.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): The Opposition are delighted to agree the progress of what we have been discussing for the past 80 minutes. That is welcome. I also thank the Leader of the House for agreeing to three days on the Floor to discuss the Finance (No.2) Bill, which we felt strongly about.

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her comments, and for the co-operation we have had in rescheduling the business for Wednesday, not only from the official Opposition but from other parties.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I welcome the circumstances that have made the change in business necessary. It will have the full co-operation of the Liberal Democrats.

Mrs. Taylor: We are having much co-operation on the matter. I trust that it will be maintained, that everyone will share the good will that has arisen from the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and that we will be able to make early progress in the House to ensure that progress on peace is maintained.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Not having been in the House for the opening words of the statement of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Madam Speaker, I was, under your very proper rule, unable to take part in the exchanges. I take this early opportunity of congratulating the Government on their achievement, the leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland on their generosity and courage, and the people of Northern Ireland on their resolution. I am delighted that we will be attending to this business on Wednesday.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs. Taylor: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will have a positive contribution to make on Wednesday and on other occasions. I think that some hon. Members try to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, even though they have not been here for statements. I am sure that, if others followed the lead of the right hon. Gentleman, the House would respect them the more for it. I hope that he was in the House to hear the tributes paid to his work in Northern Ireland.

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman was in the House to hear the very considerable tributes that were paid to him. Indeed, I thought that he had been here for the entire statement. Had he stood, I would have called him, although I would have been remiss in doing so.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): Although I welcome the circumstances that have changed the business for Wednesday, they knock out the first day of the Report stage of the Scotland Bill. Can the Leader of the House say when she expects that business to be rescheduled?

Mrs. Taylor: I cannot give that decision today, but I hope in my business statement on Thursday to be able to cover the point.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I am sorry to enter a dissenting note. As I understand it, the right hon. Lady proposes that the Committee stage and Report stage of Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill should be taken on Wednesday. That means that the House will go straight to the Committee and Report stages after Second Reading. Does she accept that that is in principle undesirable? I hope that she will allow some time to elapse.

The right hon. Lady will have noticed that we are talking about assemblies or parliaments for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but nothing for England. That highlights a question that those on the Government Front Bench will have to address.

Mrs. Taylor: I regret that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to enter a dissenting voice. I should have thought that, given the nature of the business that we are discussing, it is desirable that we make as much progress as we can, as quickly as we can. It is not unprecedented to take Bills in this way. If we are all serious about wanting to make progress, which I believe is the general wish of the House, it is important that we take the Bill as speedily as possible.

WELSH AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee),

That the matter of the rural economy in Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Bank of England Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 4

ANNUAL REPORT BY THE BANK

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 3, line 5, at end insert—

("( ) The report mentioned in subsection (2)(a) shall, in particular, include a review of the Bank's performance in relation to its objectives and strategy, as determined by the court of directors of the Bank, in the financial year to which the report under this section relates.")

4.53 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3.

Mrs. Liddell: These three amendments, which have come to us from another place, will ensure that the Bank's annual report contains details of its objectives and strategy and provide for the committee of non-executives to report specifically on them. The amendments reflect and enhance existing practice, and provide useful additional clarification of the role of the court and its sub-committee. I have pleasure in commending them to the House.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I am grateful to the Minister for explaining the background to the amendments. She said that they came to us from another place; it may help the House if I add that they came to us from Labour Back Benchers in another place. As the hon. Lady said, they usefully clarify the position.

Lords amendment No. 1 ensures that the Bank properly reviews its performance. May I ask who will lay down the objectives and strategy for the first year, which the Bank will not have been able to do before the enactment of the Bill—or do we take it that the Chancellor's correspondence setting up the new arrangements itself comprises the objectives and strategy?

Lords amendment No. 2 is self-evidently an improvement—such an improvement that I wonder why it did not occur to anyone in this place.

Lords amendment No. 3 is worth pausing over. It makes sense only if the Bank of England's report is published reasonably early in the financial year. Could the Minister help us by giving her interpretation of the phrase "as soon as practicable"? As I understand it, the Bank's report will include the accounts of the Bank of England. Many public bodies have to produce annual reports to the House that include their accounts and they sometimes struggle to get them in by end of July, when the House rises.

I hope that the Economic Secretary accepts that that is a little late in the day for us to see the statement of objectives and strategy for the forthcoming year. It may be that they can be published in some other form. Under clause 12, the Treasury's specification for monetary policy strategy and objectives can be published at any time during the 12 months. If the hon. Lady can clarify the timetable and say when she expects the annual report to be put before Parliament, I am sure that we can wish the amendments well on their way.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Lords amendment No. 1 seeks to ensure that the Bank of England sets out its objectives and strategies and then prepares a report on its success in meeting them. I am delighted that the Government have accepted the amendment proposed on Report in the Lords. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) said, I am surprised that it was not proposed by the Conservatives in Committee or included in the Bill as originally drafted. It is difficult to see how

"the Bank's performance in relation to the objectives and strategy for the time being determined by the court"

can be kept under review under clause 3(2) if there is no requirement to publish the objectives and strategy.

There is a big problem with the Bill's basis, because it takes from politicians key economic decision making in a vital area of economic policy and puts it into the hands of unelected officials. In such a case, it is the more important that every step in the decision-making process is catalogued and published so that people can see what is going on. It is more important that that happens when policy is determined by those who are unelected, because, if the policy goes wrong, there is no sanction against those officials—they cannot be turfed out of office by the electorate. As an alternative, the public must be able to see every step in the policy-making process. The setting out and publishing of strategies and objectives is a key element in achieving that.

It is important to remember that the translation of an inflation target into monetary policy is not a scientific, simple, formulaic matter. The conduct of monetary policy is as much an issue of public policy debate as the setting of the inflation target itself—indeed, I would argue that it is more political. There is a consensus on a low inflation target, but there is much less of a consensus on the means of translating that target into monetary policy. The amendment should ensure that the Bank of England publishes not only its objectives and strategies for running itself on a day-to-day basis, but a statement of how it believes monetary policy should be conducted.

5 pm

Clause 16 specifically states that the directors of the Bank

"shall keep the procedures followed by the Monetary Policy Committee under review."

That is therefore specifically to be included in the functions to be carried out by the directors as set out in clauses 2 and 3, and is to be part of the annual report required under clause 4. It is logical that the amendment should also apply to the review of the Monetary Policy Committee and therefore to the conduct of monetary policy. I should be grateful if the Economic Secretary could say whether that is the purpose of the strategy and objectives that are to be required to be published. Will they contain details of the Bank's general strategy on how

to conduct monetary policy—how it intends to translate an inflation target set by the Chancellor and the Treasury into day-to-day monetary policy?

Samuel Brittan, in giving evidence to the Treasury Committee, said:

"Monetary economics is not a hard science."

In his evidence, Lord Eatwell said:

"there is a tendency in monetary policy matters to regard certain propositions as 'obvious' and anyone who questions such propositions to be at best a nit-picking academic and at worst a crank. Yet the notion that the theory of monetary policy is 'obvious' and 'pragmatic' is belied by the fact that the theory and practice of monetary policy has undergone quite radical revisions over the past 20 years. If views held 10 years or 15 years ago were so obviously right then, why are they so obviously wrong now?"

The Bank of England should use the disclosures required by the amendment to spell out its latest thinking on what constitutes best science or best practice in the general conduct of monetary policy. The public, academics and general policy debate can then examine the Bank's propositions to determine how far they are proved correct with the passage of time.

One of the other great paradoxes and difficulties in the Bill could be eased if we were to include in the required statement of strategy some explanation relating to the inherent conflict between the Bank's conduct of monetary policy and the Government's conduct of fiscal policy. The problem with separating those functions is that, by passing control of inflation to an outside independent body, the Government could conduct a loose fiscal regime and leave the Bank of England to deal with the inflationary consequences. Indeed, some have argued that such has been the Government's record over the past 11 months. The amendment should enable the Bank to set out how it would or did respond to the Government's fiscal policies.

That would have two distinct advantages. First, it would enable the public to see the consequences of the Government's fiscal policy in terms of interest rates, mortgage rates and so on. Secondly, it would enable public policy debate to take place on the issue of whether the Bank was adopting the correct strategy in dealing with fiscal policy changes implemented by the Government. The Bank's performance will be judged at the very least principally—and probably almost entirely—by the success of its conduct of monetary policy and therefore the success or failure of the members of the Monetary Policy Committee. I hope that the amendment will enable the Bank to set out, in as much detail as possible, its strategy and objectives on the conduct of monetary policy.

Important matters relating to the conduct of exchange rate policy also need to be spelled out in any statement of objectives and strategy. The key role in the conduct of an exchange rate policy rests with the Treasury and, as with fiscal policy, it is important that the Bank sets out how it has dealt with what it perceives to be the Government's exchange rate policy. In addition, the Bank itself has some role in the implementation of exchange rate policy.

Such an approach is important for two reasons. First, it would enable the public to assess how the Bank has dealt with and responded to the Government's exchange rate policy and, with the passage of time, to decide whether that was the correct approach. Secondly and equally important, it would enable people to see what effect the Government's exchange rate policy had on the conduct of monetary policy by the Bank—in other words, the effect on mortgage and interest costs.

The Bank should also set out what it perceives to be the consequences for the exchange rate of its own conduct of monetary policy. That would help to expose the absurd situation that might occur if the Government pursued a policy of reducing the value of sterling by selling it into the market and, simultaneously, the Bank raised interest rates to reduce the money supply artificially increased by the Government.

Throughout the Committee stage, Conservative Members tried to obtain from the Government an explanation of how such conflicts would be resolved. Which policy will take priority: fiscal or monetary; exchange rate or inflation target? The Government refused—or, rather, were unable—to give an answer. The amendment might do what the Government could not, and help to make the issues transparent.

A further conflict that the amendment will help to make apparent to the public relates to the Treasury's debt management policies. Whether or not the Government finance debt through a fully funded method will have an enormous impact on the money supply figures. In his evidence to the Select Committee, Professor Tim Congdon explained in great detail that debt being fully funded or not will have a specific and direct effect on the money supply. The Bank should set out in its strategy and objectives how it will respond to the method of debt funding pursued by the Government. Again, that will enable analyses to be undertaken of whether that approach is correct and, with hindsight, it will enable the public to see the effect of Government debt management policy on the level of interest rates.

The amendment, accepted by the Government, should be used to create much greater transparency not only in the management of the Bank but in the far more important question of the performance by the Bank of its key function of managing monetary policy in general. The minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee go some way towards achieving that, but more general objectives and strategies set out in full, assessed in the light of experience, debated and discussed will do much to bring an element of democracy into what is, in essence, an undemocratic Bill.

Mrs. Liddell: I am glad that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) sees the common sense of the approach taken, because it fits in with our debates on Second Reading and in Committee. I welcome the hon. Gentleman to today's debate, as he was not with us in Committee. I hope that he will pass on to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who was with us, our good wishes to his family, about whom the Committee heard a great deal—which may have been a sign that it took the Conservatives some time to get into their stride in relation to the Bill.

I take up the specific point that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks made about who will set the Bank's strategy and objectives. As clause 2(2) says, the court as a whole will set out what that strategy is; we had a lengthy discussion in Committee on how that would be achieved. Indeed, the Chancellor mentioned the subject in his statement on 20 May 1997.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks suggested that it might be possible to hold a debate on the Bank's annual report and strategy. On 20 May last, the Chancellor of the Exchequer specifically said that it would be desirable for

[Mrs. Liddell]

the Bank's annual report to be debated in the House. The Treasury Committee, in its report on accountability of the Bank of England, also recommends that there should be a debate.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks asked about this year's timetable for the annual report. The Bank's financial year ends on 28 February, and usually an annual report is available by the end of May or the start of June. We are aware of no reason to deviate from that timetable or for the Bank to deviate from it. The Government look forward to a debate in the House soon after, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, as an experienced parliamentarian, would not expect me to involve myself in the issue of when the House will have an opportunity to debate these matters; such issues are a matter for the usual channels.

As the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) is a great fan of recycling, I am glad that he had an opportunity to recycle his speeches from Committee and from Second Reading. It is always interesting to listen to him, although one does not necessarily agree with all that he says. It will be for the court to determine the contents of the annual report. Extensive correspondence between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England has been published, as have memorandums of understanding between the Government and the Bank. There has been extensive debate in this place and elsewhere, and I am sure that the court will take into account many of the points raised.

The Government welcome Lords amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 3, which provide useful clarification. They very much fit the Government's strategy, which is in favour of greater transparency, and greater clarity of operation, of the Bank. It is useful to have greater clarity of legislation as well, so I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 agreed to.

Clause 12

SPECIFICATION OF MATTERS RELEVANT TO OBJECTIVES.

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 5, line 30, leave out ("the House of Commons") and insert ("Parliament")

Mrs. Liddell: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment would require any notice defining price stability or the Government's economic policies to be laid before the Lords as well as the House of Commons. It is about openness and about accountability to Parliament, so it should be welcomed.

I take the opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the written answer given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, in which he announced the Government's response to the consultation on cash ratio deposits. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Government have decided that the initial CRD scheme should apply a zero rate to eligible liabilities up to £400 million and 0.15 per cent. to eligible liabilities over £400 million.

In relation to the amendment, there is no reason why the House of Lords should be excluded from receipt of the Government's notice—it will be publicly available anyway. The amendment clarifies that point; I commend it to the House.

Mr. Fallon: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation and for her welcome, although she may have forgotten that I participated on Report, when I specifically drew attention to the issue of cash ratio deposits. It might have been helpful—I know that these things are difficult—to have copies of the Chief Secretary's written answer and details of the scheme before we started to consider the amendments. However, we look forward to receiving that—at some stage later today, presumably.

We welcome Lords amendment No. 4. The Minister said that the inclusion of the other place among those before whom any notice should be laid was a matter of openness and accountability; it also sounds to me like second thoughts and an improvement to the Bill. None the less, we welcome it.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 13

MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE.

Lords amendment: No. 5, in page 6, line 8, at end insert—

("( ) Of the four members appointed under subsection (2)(c) one shall be appointed on the advice of the First Minister of the Scottish Executive.")

5.15 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The Bill sets up the Monetary Policy Committee, whose job it is to set interest rates in order to meet the Government's inflation target. It is worth noting that our long-term interest rates are the lowest that they have been for some 33 years.

During the Bill's passage through the other place, an amendment was moved by Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish to the effect that one of the four members of the Monetary Policy Committee appointed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be appointed only after receiving the advice of the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament.

When the Government expressed their intention to set up the Monetary Policy Committee, we said that the members of that committee would be chosen because of their skill, because of their reputation and because of their ability to reach decisions as to the appropriate levels of interest rates for the whole of the United Kingdom.

We recognised that there was anxiety—which has continued—that the Bank of England should have regard to the, sometimes varying, economic conditions in different parts of the United Kingdom. As I shall explain shortly, we have drawn the Bill in such a way as to ensure that the court of the Bank of England has a specific duty to monitor the way in which the Monetary Policy Committee discharges that duty and, in making our most recent group of appointments to the court, we have responded to many of the legitimate concerns reflected by

Lord MacKay and others who spoke in support of his amendment. Indeed, those concerns were acknowledged by Lord McIntosh of Haringey in another place.

I have taken the trouble of reading what Lord MacKay and others said. Some of the arguments were advanced tongue in cheek, and the Government defeat by a majority in the other place was something of a tea-time raid. Interestingly, the Conservatives in the House of Commons, and presumably the nationalists—I see one member of the Scottish National party in his place—are jumping on a bandwagon being pushed by an odd group of Conservatives and hereditary peers, who, as I understand it, oppose the Monetary Policy Committee in principle.

I am bound to say, with due respect to Lord MacKay, that, excellent man though he is, I do not recall that, when he was a member of the previous Government, he ever advanced the view that conditions in Scotland were different from those anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and that any regard should be had to what Scots opinion might be on that or any other issue. However, I recognise that politics is what it is; the Conservative hereditary peers took the opportunity to put one over on the Government. I do not think that the arguments that they advanced for the amendment have any merit whatever.

Mr. Gibb: The right hon. Gentleman has said that the Government defeat was the result of Conservative hereditary peers voting against them, but the actual results—93 contents against 90 not contents—show that the Government lost by only 3 votes. As *The Times* said today, the laziness of the working peers appointed by the Labour party was responsible for the Government's defeat.

Mr. Darling: I dare say that in we shall soon have plenty of time to debate the workings of the other place. The fact remains that more than half of those who voted against the Government were hereditary peers. On practically every occasion when the Government have been defeated in the other place, it has happened only because of the voting strength of the hereditary peers—who tend to support the Conservative party.

The scheme of devolution that we have proposed and that will result in a Scottish Parliament proceeds on the principle that power will be devolved unless it can be more effectively discharged by the United Kingdom Parliament. Economic matters, particularly monetary policy, are not devolved, for the simple reason that there is only one currency in the United Kingdom, and it is difficult to see how monetary policy could be conducted on anything other than a UK-wide basis.

Although there are undoubted regional variations in economic performance, the fact is that it would be very difficult to operate monetary policy in any other way. That is why economic matters and monetary policy have not been devolved. Scotland will remain part of the UK. We do not propose a separatist solution, or a federalist solution of the type that the Liberal Democrats would like at some stage.

We believe that the monetary policy committee must reach its policy decisions having regard to what is good for the whole of the UK economy. Indeed, it would be very difficult to do otherwise. Economic conditions in different parts of Scotland differ greatly. There is evidence of significant overheating in the Edinburgh housing market, but the same cannot be said of Wick. Economic conditions are also quite different in Edinburgh and Glasgow, only 40 miles apart.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside) *rose—*

Mr. Darling: Clearly the hon. Gentleman anticipates that my arguments will not agree with his view—which is that Scotland is completely different from England, and that economic conditions everywhere in Scotland are exactly the same. That view of the modern economy is economically illiterate.

Mr. Swinney: The Chief Secretary is entitled to his definition of economic illiteracy. Does he accept that interest rate policy in the United Kingdom should be influenced by the fact that house prices in the south of England have in the past 12 months increased by more than 12 per cent., while in Scotland they have fallen by 1 per cent? Should that not have some bearing on any decisions taken by the Monetary Policy Committee?

Mr. Darling: I can speak with some feeling when I tell the hon. Gentleman that that is certainly not true of Edinburgh, where house prices are rising dramatically.

I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's constituency is not the same as Edinburgh; nor is the constituency of his hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh), who has just joined us. While there is undoubtedly pressure on house prices in the south-east of England, the same cannot be said of parts of the north-east of England. The point is that inflationary pressures are, and will be, different in different parts of the UK, but it is necessary to take an overall view. Not even the nationalists would argue for a different monetary policy for each county or district. Interest rates need to be set to achieve inflation targets for the whole of the United Kingdom.

I remind the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) that his party is in favour of Scotland, or the United Kingdom, joining the European single currency. Interest rates will then have to be set for the whole of Europe, never mind the United Kingdom. It is therefore somewhat inconsistent to maintain that Scotland should opt out.

In any case, that is not what the amendment would do. It acknowledges that there is concern, and that the Monetary Policy Committee should have regard to the differing economic conditions in different parts of the country, but we had anticipated that. Under the old system, the criticism was that the Bank of England sometimes gave the impression that it did not acknowledge the problems experienced by different parts of the UK.

That is why the Bill makes it clear that one of the duties of the reformed court of the Bank of England will be to keep under review the way in which the Monetary Policy Committee reaches its decisions and collects the regional, sectoral and other information on which it is necessary to base them. Clause 16 lays that down; I am sure that if hon. Members have not read it, they will do so now. The Lords amendment is not necessary, because of the safeguard that we have inserted in the Bill.

[Mr. Darling]

We said before the election that we thought that the court ought to be more reflective of the differing interests of the whole of the UK. We made the latest group of appointments in February; hon. Members will be aware that, for the first time ever, there are now individuals on the court representing interests in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Jim Stretton, chief executive of the Standard Life assurance company and well respected in Scotland, has been put on the board. In anticipation of his appointment, he has already taken steps to ensure that conditions in Scotland are made known to the Monetary Policy Committee and to other members of the court.

Graham Hawker, chief executive of Hyder, has also been put on the court. He has been a director of Welsh Water for more than a year, and is well known in Wales. We have also appointed Roy Bailie from Northern Ireland, who is not only a former chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board but was chairman of the CBI in Northern Ireland between 1992 and 1994. Another appointment is Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union—unlike the former Government, we have no aversion to including people from the trade union movement on the court of the Bank of England. He will lend his experience, and that of people involved in manufacturing industry, to the process. There is also Sheila McKechnie from the Consumers Association.

All those people are examples of the Government's willingness to broaden the base of the court of the Bank of England. As we make further appointments over the next few years, we shall ensure that the court has a wide base throughout the whole country. Under the terms of clause 16, the Monetary Policy Committee will thus be enabled to reach decisions that will be good for the whole UK.

The Lords amendment was an attempt to make mischief. Their Lordships are of course entitled to take advantage of their opportunities. The matter was never raised in Committee or on Report, which suggests that Opposition Members did not feel strongly about it at the time.

Above all, the amendment is not necessary. The Chancellor of the Exchequer appoints members of the Monetary Policy Committee on the basis of what he believes best for the whole of the country, not just one part of it. The reforms that we have made to the court, and the people whom we have put on it, will ensure that the interests of Scotland and other parts of the UK are taken into account. The amendment should be rejected. It was an unnecessary bit of mischief making, which adds nothing to the Bill.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Although the amendment comes from another place, it fits well with the concerns expressed about the Bill in the House and in Standing Committee, and particularly with worries expressed on both sides of the House on occasion about the powers and composition of the Monetary Policy Committee. The Chief Secretary has just reminded us that the court of directors of the Bank of England is drawn from a wide spectrum of experience and backgrounds, but that is not the point.

We are discussing the Monetary Policy Committee, which is the decision-making committee that determines interest rates, and therefore affects mortgage holders, businesses and anyone who borrows or lends money. It affects people and businesses not just directly, but through its effect on the exchange rate and its influence on economic policy generally. The importance of the amendment reflects the central importance of the Monetary Policy Committee.

Anyone who doubts that has only to look at what has been happening in the past few months, when the committee has been setting interest rates. There is an almost even split on the committee between those who want to leave interest rates where they are and those who want to put them up. It has been the job of the Governor of the bank to cast his vote, in those cases against a rise.

5.30 pm

That is not an altogether happy situation. It has not brought certainty and stability, because of the widespread view that another rise in interest rates is inevitable at some point. That is what the markets anticipate, and it has contributed to the strength of sterling and the consequential damage to industry and exporters. The Chancellor of the Exchequer says that the matter is nothing to do with him. He has washed his hands of the whole affair and says that it is now the job of the Monetary Policy Committee.

It is beyond dispute that the committee is extremely important. The issue of who is appointed and how members are appointed is equally important. In Standing Committee and on Report, we examined the case for confirmatory hearings, which would be one way of giving the House and hon. Members an input into appointments to the committee. The idea of confirmatory hearings came from the Treasury Select Committee, which of course has a Labour majority and a Labour Chairman. The House divided on Report on the Committee's suggestion to implement confirmatory hearings, although, mysteriously and regrettably, the Labour members of the Committee, having proposed the amendment, all disappeared when the House divided. We lost the vote, but we won the argument.

Confirmatory hearings would have been a good idea. The powers of patronage enjoyed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are very great—possibly too great. He directly or indirectly appoints all the members of the Monetary Policy Committee. Not only do the appointments give him that power, but the term of appointment is short. Members are appointed for only three years. In comparison with other central banks, that is a very short term. Members of the Bundesbank are appointed for eight years, and those serving on the Federal Reserve bank of the United States serve for 14 years. That is done deliberately to give them a degree of independence from the Executive, which gives members and their committees credibility in the markets.

The three-year term for which the Chancellor has opted means that committee members can be sacked or reappointed within the term of one Parliament. If they are politically inconvenient or defy the Government's monetary policy, it is possible to get rid of them in short order. That concerned hon. Members on both sides in Committee and on Report. We tackled the issue in various ways. Amendments were moved not just to institute confirmatory hearings in line with the Treasury Select Committee's proposal, but to give members of the committee longer terms of appointment, and to require

fuller minutes, which would give the views of the members of the committee to the public and to the markets.

We also thought that the pay of at least some committee members should be related to performance, and we proposed an amendment to require the Monetary Policy Committee to report on any developing split between monetary and fiscal policy, which was rather a perceptive amendment in view of what has happened since then, as there is now a clear divergence between monetary and fiscal policy, which is one reason why interest rates have had to go up five times since the election, with consequential damage—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is straying outside the precise terms of the Lords amendment before us, which is about Scotland.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I never wish to defy you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall return briskly to the amendment. I wanted to remind the House of the importance of the Monetary Policy Committee, the way in which it is appointed and who serves on it, and the measures whereby we tried to improve that.

It took the other place successfully to pass an amendment, which was moved by my noble Friend Lord MacKay. The amendment would give the First Minister of the Scottish Executive, when he is in place, the right to advise on one of the external appointments. It arose from what was by any standard a good debate in another place. I was disappointed by the way in which the Chief Secretary dismissed the amendment on the ground that it was simply voted through by hereditary peers. If he studied the debate, as he said he had, he would agree that it was the quality of debate that was important.

The amendment tackles many of the points on which I have been digressing. First, it widens the appointment procedure. By making one of the appointments dependent on the advice of the First Minister, it takes at least some of the monopoly of patronage away from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, although it still gives him considerable latitude. The First Minister might suggest a number of candidates, from whom the Chancellor could choose. In any case, the person appointed in this way to the Monetary Policy Committee is not required to be resident in Scotland or even to be a Scot. It could be someone temporarily working in Scotland with experience elsewhere, or a Scot who might have an appointment or be working in a business south of the border.

The amendment allows complete discretion, but gives another input into the selection procedure. It therefore introduces—this is the second point—an element of devolution. The present appointees on the Monetary Policy Committee come exclusively from the south-east of England, or at least the southern part of the country. They are all splendid people with a great deal of experience. There is no criticism of them but, as has been noted, they all come from a triangle that links Oxford, Cambridge and London. It would strengthen the Monetary Policy Committee and its credibility in the markets if one of its members came from another part of the country or was appointed by someone from another part of the United Kingdom, and had a different perspective on the decisions to be taken.

In resisting the amendment, the Chief Secretary suggested that Scotland would be treated differently from England. That is not the case: it is not the decision that would be devolved to Scotland, but the appointment of one of the people on the committee that takes the decisions. I can think of no better place to devolve that appointment. Scotland is the birthplace of perhaps the greatest ever economist, Adam Smith, and I am sure that there are other people in the present day of similar calibre. Edinburgh has a very large financial sector and its banking system is distinct from that of England.

For those reasons, I believe that the amendment deserves support. Anticipating the Liberal Democrats' contribution, let me say that I cannot support their idea of widening the measure to allow for an appointment from each constituent country of the United Kingdom. I think that the Liberal Democrats wish to see one appointment from Wales, one from Northern Ireland and one from Scotland, which would leave only one appointment from England. That would introduce a wholly unnecessary degree of federalism and is perhaps another example of the Liberal Democrats' adopting someone else's idea and making it unworkable. I note in passing that the idea of a Scottish appointment is supported by the Scottish Trades Union Congress—

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): If this is such a great idea, why did the right hon. Gentleman not mention it before in the House or in Committee when we discussed the matter at great length?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman has attended the debate for only the past few minutes, but he will have heard me list the alternative amendments that we pressed upon the House. I regret that the hon. Gentleman apparently took no interest in them at the time, because they would have had an effect similar to that of this amendment. For instance, they would have given the hon. Gentleman an input—if he desired it—into the decision making through the Treasury Select Committee and confirmatory hearings.

One of our regrets in Committee was that Labour Members were carefully chosen to serve on the Standing Committee in such a way as to filter out anyone with independent views or powers of scrutiny. No Labour Member who spoke critically or showed that he had something to contribute in the Second Reading debate was included in the Standing Committee membership. For instance, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) made an extremely penetrating speech on Second Reading, and we regretted that he was not a member of the Committee and we could not discuss his views at greater length. Perhaps he does not regret that fact, but we did occasionally.

A range of Labour Members who did not have a great deal to contribute served on the Committee. Therefore, although we persistently won the argument, we always lost the vote, and it was left to the other place to devise the amendment that we are now discussing. It sweeps up many of our ideas and amendments. It may not be perfect—in fact, I prefer some of our amendments—but it is a valid and constructive contribution to the question of how members of the Monetary Policy Committee should be appointed, how that committee should operate and how it might gain enhanced credibility from that method of appointment.

In summary, the Lords amendment places a modest constraint on the untrammelled powers of patronage enjoyed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is a modest

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

element of devolution, and it could improve the decision making and standing of the Monetary Policy Committee. For those reasons, I urge the House to accept the Lords amendment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I rise to speak in favour of this intriguing little amendment which has been proposed by that well-known defender of Scottish interests, the House of Lords. I moved a similar amendment before the Bill left this place which sought to ensure a wider geographical representation on both the court of directors and the Monetary Policy Committee. I would like to see representatives from Scotland appointed by the First Minister for Scotland as well as a representative from the north of England.

It is vital that the committee reflects a wide spread of interests. The Minister said, quite rightly, that the committee is the custodian of the national interest. However, the national interest comprises regional interests and the interests of different sections of our society. That includes manufacturing interests in the north and in Scotland, as well as the interests of finance and financial services in London. Therefore, I would like to see specific geographically based representatives serving on the committee. That is the only way in which we shall reach some consensus about the national interest.

Committee members are not Olympians who give a detached opinion about what is in the national interest: they are all pushing a particular barrow. If their interest is not geographical, the committee will reflect the interests of finance. I do not wish to see finance dominate the interests of manufacturing in this country.

5.45 pm

This is an interesting and important little amendment. I understand why the Government intend to oppose it, but it is a little sad to see a Scottish party rejecting this Lords amendment. It is not a happy spectacle. The amendment also allows us to mention some concerns that a Scottish representative on the Monetary Policy Committee might have raised during that committee's deliberations. There is no doubt that the experience of that committee—which is at work even before the legislation is passed—has not been happy, to say the least. Its operations have been very messy indeed.

It is not as though the committee comprises a body of independent monetary experts who, in light of their academic knowledge about the workings of inflation, can read the dials and pull the appropriate levers, which results in the inevitable inflationary effect in 18 months. The economy does not work like that, and the myths of monetarism have been exploded. The monetary target towards which the committee has worked is undoubtedly far too tight. That has led to deflation, and consequently to high interest rates in this country. It has pushed up the value of the pound, making it attractive to the money pouring out of Europe as a result of instability caused by pursuit of the monetary union farce. That money goes into sterling, which pushes up the value of the pound.

At the same time, the deutschmark has been deliberately and steadily depreciated, and far eastern currencies have also been devalued substantially. As a result, the Monetary Policy Committee—which does not include a Scottish representative—is not able to do its job properly. It is becoming the instrument of over-valuation, which will lead to a major recession this time next year.

I am afraid that we have appointed the wrong people to the Monetary Policy Committee. They are eminent academics: almighty, invisible academics only wise, like light inaccessible hid from our eyes—at least for six weeks until they have taken their decisions. That brings me to another point: the decisions should be known immediately. Why are the committee's minutes not published immediately, so that they may be subject to lobbying?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman has enough parliamentary experience to know that he is moving into a general debate about the role of the committee. That is not the intention of the amendment under discussion.

Mr. Mitchell: A Scottish representative would introduce a note of canny common sense which does not seem to have operated in the committee thus far. I think that it is important to strengthen the representation of the interests of manufacturing in the way that this Lords amendment would do. When the Monetary Policy Committee was first constituted, I thought that Bank of England officials, because of their long desire for high interest rates—the first reflex of the Bank of England is: when in doubt, put up interest rates—would act as agents for deflation. I thought that the Government's appointees would work in a different way and serve the people's interests, which lie in growth, expansion, jobs and full employment. However, the exact opposite has occurred.

Of the appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, only Dee Ann Julius has been voting for sense. That is incredible. We have appointed experts to advance the interests of the people and the Government's views, yet they are voting consistently and persistently for higher interest rates. I hoped that Scottish representation would be a weight against such an automatic bias in favour of deflation, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has imposed on us.

When the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World bank and the International Monetary Fund are saying that there is no need further to increase British interest rates—there is a case for them being reduced—it is incredible that our appointees are still urging a further increase in interest rates. Let the members of the committee be accessible, and let them be Scottish. Let them speak for the interests of the people.

The members of the committee are subject to lobbying, and lobbying should take place. We need to know what they have said immediately they have said it. The experiment has begun badly, with a messy procedure that is creating not stability but endless speculation, argument and pleas that the committee should make a final statement to the effect, "That is the end of increases in interest rates and we shall now start on the way to reducing them." There are constant calls for that action to be taken, but that cannot be, because the committee is divided. As I have said, it is not giving us stability or sense. Instead, it is creating a scenario of deflation. If outside interests were appointed, the committee might be led to sense.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer must do something to stop the remorseless rise of the pound, which is so damaging to our manufacturing base. I have sent him various solutions, and I hope that he accepts them. I hope also that he will consider the arguments that I have advanced this evening. Certainly something must be done.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I oppose the Government's motion to disagree with the amendment. I support the amendment for some, if not all, of the reasons advanced by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). Although the amendment is far from perfect, it would give Scotland at least some say on appointments to the powerful Monetary Policy Committee. Liberal Democrats believe that such a small but significant element of guaranteed representation, or a voice in appointments to the MPC, would give Scotland an extra dimension, and would be useful in ensuring more effective policy making within the Bank.

My party's position needs a little explanation because my colleagues in the other place voted with the Government on the amendment. They did so for reasons that we understand and share. Indeed, my hon. Friends and I tabled amendments whose thrust met the criticisms of our colleagues in the other place. Criticisms of the original amendment were limited to scope. Unfortunately, despite our best endeavours, we failed to produce an amendment that you and your colleagues, Mr. Deputy Speaker, could deem to be in order.

I wish to place on record again our view, as advanced by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in Committee and on Report, which is contrary to what the Chief Secretary alleged. We believe that the newly independent Bank of England should represent fully all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. In the spirit of our amendments, we shall support the Lords amendment, which provides the only element of additional representation on offer.

Speaking in the other place, Lord Newby explained why Liberal Democrats felt that the interests of Wales, Northern Ireland and the regions of Britain should all be captured in the deliberations of the MPC. Such representation is not uncommon on the management and decision-making boards—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to speak to amendments that were not selected. He must not do that.

Mr. Davey: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to make a connection that is relevant to the position of Liberal Democrats in tonight's vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I allowed the hon. Gentleman to make that connection. He must not now develop an argument.

Mr. Davey: My argument, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that representation such as the amendment would grant is not uncommon in other independent banks. The comments that I shall proceed to make are directly relevant and I hope that you will find them in order.

The Federal Reserve Bank of the United States and the Bundesbank in Germany have representation that goes beyond the central area. Against that background, the amendment does not represent a madcap invention. Instead, it focuses on a tried-and-tested way in which to operate decision making on monetary policy. It would ensure that a region's voice could be heard and that differing economic conditions could be taken account of in setting interest rates.

The Chief Secretary has argued that clause 16(2) meets the regional representation issue. The clause requires the court to ensure that the MPC has collected the necessary regional and sectoral data and examined them. The right hon. Gentleman said that, by appointing people to the court of the Bank who are clearly identified with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Government have demonstrated that they believe that the regions will be fully represented.

Such measures are superficial; the data requirement would have been met in any event. Before the Bill was introduced, the monetary-policy-making authorities examined similar data to that which will come before the MPC. The problem with the Government's approach, as the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said, is that no one who takes decisions on interest rates will represent the nations and regions of our country.

As the Bill stands, no one on the MPC need be from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Although the members of the committee are all eminent people, no one would suggest that they spent, or have spent, the bulk of their working lives outside what the right hon. Member for Wells described as the triangle of Oxford, Cambridge and London. The Government's approach to recognising nationhood and regionalism in the Bill is insufficient. The amendment is intended to put that right, albeit only partially.

It has been argued that such representation is not necessary because Britain is not a federal state, yet, as we are passing the Bill, the United Kingdom is fast down the track of becoming such a state. Perhaps it is not yet in name a federal state, but it is very much so in practice, with a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh assembly, and now an assembly in Northern Ireland. There is to be a council of the British Isles.

The institutions of UK federalism are being formed. These institutions need to be nourished and further developed. Options such as government in the English regions or national government for England alone are now being actively discussed in all parties. Recognising the regions and nations more explicitly in the Bank's new decision-making body would help to nourish federalism in the UK.

The Chief Secretary argued that the MPC should be made up solely of the best available people and should not be restricted to representatives from Scotland or elsewhere. Indeed, it should have the best people. However, the suggestion that Scotland could not supply such people shows an amazing lack of confidence in the right hon. Gentleman's countrymen. Given the number of successful Scottish business men and economists, going back to Adam Smith, as the right hon. Member for Wells said, I am surprised that the Chief Secretary does not have more confidence in his countrymen. As he sits on the Treasury Bench, which is stuffed full of Scots, I am surprised that he takes a rather weak and indecisive approach.

[Mr. Davey]

At this late stage, I urge the Government to think again and to give Scotland a voice in appointments to the MPC, as a first step to allowing wider national and regional involvement.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I was delighted to hear a Liberal Democrat Member, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), advancing the opposite case to that which his party supported in the other place. I have often heard that Liberal Democrats have a habit of doing that. However, this evening is the first time that I have heard a Liberal Democrat Member indulge in the practice. It was impressive.

It is with some trepidation that I support my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. That is not because of lack of conviction about the arguments which he advanced, but because of my friendship with Lord MacKay, who argued the opposite case in another place. As I am likely to sit in a small boat fishing with him at some time over the next few weeks, I shall tread carefully. If one thing is sure, the Tay is running deep at this time of year. I suspect that I would sink like a stone.

There is only one key argument, but it has two parts. First, should there be regional representation in the Bank of England? I think that it is agreed that there should be. Secondly, should that representation be on the Monetary Policy Committee? That is a different kettle of fish.

I am absolutely convinced that there is—as there should be—adequate representation of regional interests on the court of the Bank of England through our policy, and that will be more so in future. It is highly illogical to say that the membership of a small, tight committee such as the Monetary Policy Committee should be gradually expanded to encompass whatever form of federal or regional government we decide on over the next few years: we are talking about a Scot today, but it may be an Irishman tomorrow, then a Welshman, then a Yorkshireman and then someone from the north of England. We would have the sort of committee that used to be set up in certain parts of the Labour party not long ago: the way in which to make absolutely certain that a decision was not reached was to put everyone with a point of view on the committee.

The amendment is nonsense. The MPC should be small, tightly focused and appointed in the way it is at the moment, so that there is no dubiety about who is on it and why. There is adequate provision for regional points of view to be considered by the court, and that is where they should stay.

6 pm

Mr. Swinney: For a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may have thought that Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish was still a Member of this House because of the way in which he is haunting the debate like a spectre. I appreciate the concern of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) about his future in a boat on the deep River Tay; I shall alert the bailiffs in my constituency to his imminent presence with Lord MacKay to ensure his protection.

The remarks of the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) bore a startling resemblance to the *Hansard* report of Lord MacKay's contribution to the debate in the other place. Notwithstanding that, I welcome the debate. The heart of the argument is the question of how representative the MPC is of the component economies of the United Kingdom and of different economic conditions.

I want to comment on the component economy of Scotland in relation to the United Kingdom. I intervened on the Chief Secretary to point out that the latest Halifax survey shows that house prices in the south-east have increased by 12.4 per cent. in the past 12 months, but in Scotland, have fallen by just under 1 per cent. I accept that patterns of overheating and house price increases are not uniform, but there are substantial differences in the nature and pattern of economic activity between those two important parts of the United Kingdom.

According to the Scottish Council (Development and Industry), Scotland's manufacturing exports last year were valued at more than £20 billion and were higher per head than those of other parts of the United Kingdom. Today, there has been a further and welcome initiative from Scottish Trade International to boost the export performance of Scotland, but it is difficult to promote such an initiative when the value of sterling is so high and the relationship between interest rates and the value of sterling is creating difficulties for our exporters. Unemployment in Scotland is now consistently higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom, which is a disturbing change to the trend.

In response to my intervention, the Chief Secretary said that there was overheating in the economy in different parts of the country; he is obviously familiar with overheating in the Edinburgh house market. On how many occasions would he expect the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee to turn a blind eye to overheating in the economy of the south-east of England? I suspect that it would never do so, because it observes such conditions primarily to guarantee that the economic policy of the United Kingdom is sustained. Under Labour and Conservative Governments, it has persistently been directed by the prevailing economic conditions in the south of England.

The Chief Secretary made a series of points about the way in which the composition of the court of the Bank of England had ensured that the different component factors of the economy of the United Kingdom could be borne in mind in its discussions and decisions. Everything that he said about the Bank of England court would be justifiable and valid about the MPC, which takes decisions that are of much greater significance to the economy of Scotland.

I welcome Jim Stretton's appointment to the court of the Bank of England. Having worked in the life insurance sector before being elected to the House, I am aware of his formidable reputation in the industry, but he is not on the MPC, which is where big decisions about interest rates, which affect the livelihoods of manufacturers and exporters within the Scottish economy and in the rest of the United Kingdom, are taken.

Will the Chief Secretary say what input is given to the MPC in relation to the divergent patterns of economic activity within the United Kingdom? There is scant reference to the economic conditions of Scotland in the minutes of the MPC, and I should welcome his guidance on whether there is a need to improve the amount and type of information that goes to the MPC to ensure that it hears a more representative account of the position of the United Kingdom economy.

The MPC is where the action is; it has increased interest rates five times since the general election, and there should be a voice for Scotland. For that reason, we shall support the Lords amendment.

Mr. Darling: I cannot agree with the last argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) has finished his remarks, so the Chief Secretary should seek the leave of the House to speak.

Mr. Darling: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that I do not agree with the Scottish National party's argument? It tends to view everything in terms of the difference between Scotland and England and, somehow, everything is the fault of the English. I represent a Scottish constituency, and I think that I represent the majority view of Scotland, which does not take that simplistic and sometimes nasty view of the way of things. We live in the United Kingdom and remain part of it.

We have heard two arguments. The first came from Conservative Members and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). They were against the concept of independence for the Bank of England in the first place, and always have been against it. It is curious that the shadow Chief Secretary has embraced a Lords amendment that would give a voice to the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament on something in which the right hon. Gentleman does not believe.

Interest rates have had to go up; it would have been much better if the previous Government in their last months in office had taken the necessary steps to ensure that we achieved the long-term stability that this country needs rather than ducking decisions purely because the Conservative party might have been damaged even more in the run-up to the general election.

The second irony is that the shadow Chief Secretary and, for the first time in a generation, the Conservative party, seem to care what Scotland thinks. Conservatives say that they want to save us from the works of the Monetary Policy Committee by having a voice for Scotland on it. It is nice that the Conservative party has such confidence in Scotland.

The amendment has no merit whatever. It is unnecessary, and the court of the Bank of England is far more widely representative than ever—the previous Government did nothing about that in 18 years in power. Our reforms of the MPC are in the long-term interests of the United Kingdom, which is evidenced by the fact that long-term interest rates are the lowest for 33 years. On that basis, I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Fallon: The Government cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, the Economic Secretary commends previous Lords amendments as sensible revisions from the revising Chamber; on the other, the Chief Secretary whinges that this amendment is the result of a teatime ambush. If it is, whose fault is that? Perhaps it is that of the Government Whips in the other place, or of new Labour peers, who have been nominated to the other place but are too busy to attend. Perhaps they are spending more time with their money—who knows?

The Chief Secretary has wholly misunderstood the amendment. Appointments to the Monetary Policy Committee would still be made by the Chancellor if it were accepted. He would simply be required to make one appointment on the advice of the First Minister. What is the Chief Secretary frightened of? He does not appear to have much confidence in the first First Minister, whoever he might be. I thought that it was supposed to be the current Secretary of State for Scotland. Under this amendment, why would he want to nominate someone of whom the Chancellor would not approve? That argument simply will not wash.

The Chief Secretary's argument that, because we opposed the Bill in the first place, we should not now support the amendment, will not wash either. We did not want an independent Bank of England of the nature that is set up by the Bill but, as we are getting one, we do not see why the Monetary Policy Committee should not better reflect all parts of the UK.

This is an amendment for openness. It widens the membership of the Monetary Policy Committee and helps to break up the Oxbridge-London mafia—*[Interruption.]* I certainly support its break-up. Above all, it is an amendment for Scotland, which all true Scots should be proud to support. I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose the Government's motion.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 231, Noes 107.

Division No. 248] **[6.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caton, Martin
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*

Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wooles, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moss, Malcolm
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Spicer, Sir Michael
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. John Whittingdale.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Lords amendment disagreed to.

Clause 28

BOARD OF BANKING SUPERVISION

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 12, line 9, leave out (", who shall chair the Board,")

Mrs. Liddell: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendment No. 7.

Mrs. Liddell: The amendments further reinforce the independence of the Board of Banking Supervision by giving the chair to one of the non-executive members. We have consulted the Financial Services Authority chairman, Howard Davies, and, through him, the non-executive members of the board. Having done so, and having confirmed that they are content with this change to their rules, I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Fallon: We, too, welcome the change made to the Bill on Third Reading in another place. Those who believe in transparency clearly consider it a good idea that the chairman of the authority should not also be the chairman of the Board of Banking Supervision, especially when that board may be investigating the performance of the authority, deciding not to investigate the performance of that authority or, as in the Barings case, dealing with the conclusions of that investigation.

That brings us to the bigger question of exactly what the Board of Banking Supervision's new role is going to be. Perhaps the Economic Secretary can tell us briefly whether it is to be advisory or supervisory.

The independence that the Economic Secretary is now accepting for the chairmanship, which we welcome, brings out the issue of practitioner involvement. I must say at once that we are not happy with what the FSA is proposing in its consultative documents, and we expect a considerable improvement when the draft clauses are published later this year.

Mrs. Liddell: I reiterate the point made in Committee, which is that we do not propose to retain the Board of Banking Supervision in its current form when we introduce new legislation. That would not be in keeping with the wider regulatory responsibilities of the FSA. The FSA has been consulting on the issue of practitioner input for the longer term. It is not a subject that we would want to discuss at this stage, but there will be plenty of opportunity to do so at the end of the consultation period, when the legislation comes before the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 7 agreed to.

Clause 40

ORDERS

Lords amendment: No. 8, in page 16, line 12, at end insert

("or

paragraph 3(2) of Schedule 7,")

Mrs. Liddell: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendment No. 9.

Mrs. Liddell: The House will be aware that the House of Lords Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Deregulation considered the order-making powers contained in the Bill. Its report of 4 February recommended that the parliamentary procedure to implement the power under paragraph 3(2) of schedule 7 should be the affirmative rather than the negative. The Government accepted the Committee's recommendation, and I accordingly commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Gibb: I am a relatively new Member of the House, and I wish to raise a concern that I and other new Members have—one that is shared increasingly by people outside, especially those who need access to legislation. It relates to the growing amount of delegated legislation. It has been a feature of all Governments in recent years, but it appears to be a particular penchant of the new Labour Government. For example, it now appears that major tax changes, such as reforms to the capital gains legislation, are to be introduced by statutory instrument rather than through the Finance Bill.

The 11th report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Deregulation says of paragraph 3(2) of schedule 7:

"The power to amend the Table is potentially wide, and the appropriate degree of parliamentary control depends on the uses to which it will be put. The House may wish to consider whether it is not of such significance as to justify amending the Bill to provide for the affirmative resolution procedure, rather than the negative procedure currently proposed in the Bill."

Indeed, the memorandum to the Select Committee prepared by the Treasury lists in an annex all the new delegated powers created by the Bill—there are some 15 new delegated powers from one single Bill.

I raise this matter now as a concerned Back Bencher, but it was already of general concern when I was in practice before entering the House. Will the Minister confirm that she is aware of this widespread concern, and give an assurance that the Government will seek to redress the huge increase in secondary legislation which has been their hallmark since it came to power a year ago?

Mrs. Liddell: The Government believe—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must ask the leave of the House.

Mrs. Liddell: With the leave of the House. As a relatively new Member, I also make mistakes.

The Government have made it clear that we believe in consultation, and in listening to people's views. Although I am a comparatively new Member, I was in the House during the last Parliament when the previous Government used the deregulation orders many times and in relation to secondary legislation. Therefore, I believe that this amendment is a useful addition to the Bill, and I reiterate my commendation of it to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 9 agreed to.

Clause 44

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 10, in page 16, line 32, at end insert—

("(1A) Section 33 extends to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.")

6.30 pm

Mrs. Liddell: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This is a technical amendment that would ensure that the transfer of the gilts registration function of the National Savings stock register to the Bank of England register also has legal effect in the Channel Islands and in the Isle of Man. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Gibb: Does this amendment have anything at all to do with the review into those territories being conducted by the Home Secretary?

Mrs. Liddell: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker—no.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Schedule 5

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 11, in page 29, line 22, leave out ("paragraphs 31 and") and insert ("paragraph")

Mrs. Liddell: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 16.

Mrs. Liddell: This is a group of six technical amendments. Amendment No. 11 tidies up the consequential amendment contained in schedule 5. Amendments Nos. 12, 13 and 16 would ensure that consequential changes to the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 are accurate. Amendment No. 14 is required to make a consequential amendment to the Building Societies Act 1997. It arises because of the transfer of banking supervision to the Financial Services Authority. Amendment No. 15 would remove some redundant definitions from the Bill. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Fallon: I want briefly to raise two issues. The Economic Secretary described the amendments as technical. Amendment No. 14 is not that technical. As I understand it, it replaces the Bank of England with the Financial Services Authority as the consultative body if any amalgamation is proposed to the Building Societies Investor Protection Board and the Deposit Protection Board. It might assist the House if the hon. Lady said whether that is the Government's immediate intention—is an amalgamation proposed?

I put the hon. Lady on notice that we will need to go into greater detail on the role of the Financial Services Authority as it relates to building societies more generally. While we were all on holiday, the Treasury slipped out an announcement about a voluntary code, which ensures that generally building societies will not be brought under the arrangements for the new authority.

Perhaps the hon. Lady could help the House on amendment No. 15, which would delete the words "overseas institution" and "representative office". The other place was told that the words were no longer needed in the Bill, because they had no operative effect, yet they are still in paragraph 1 of schedule 8. Perhaps the Economic Secretary could explain why, if they have no operative effect, they are still in the Bill.

Mrs. Liddell: The Building Societies Act 1997, which went through with the co-operation of both sides of the House, makes provision for a future amalgamation of the Building Societies Investor Protection Board with the Deposit Protection Board. Provision is made for consultation with the Building Societies Commission and the Bank before making any order effective. It will be for the Governor of the Bank to appoint ordinary members of the new board. Therefore, it is sensible to make consequential amendments that draw together the reality of the Financial Services Authority in relation to building societies.

There was no question of the Government sneaking out a voluntary code on building societies—it was introduced by the Council of Mortgage Lenders last July. We merely made an announcement that we would see how it operated before deciding whether the future financial services legislation would contain such a provision. I hope that it is clear that in no sense did the Government try to sneak through a critical measure while the House was in recess. Indeed, the announcement was made before the House rose—although some people may have risen slightly earlier than others.

On amendment No. 15, as the hon. Gentleman said, the words "overseas institution" and "representative office" have no operative effect, so there is no need to define them. The amendment would remove their definitions from the Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 16 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up a Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 5 to the Bill: Mr. Robert Ainsworth, Mr. Michael Fallon, Mr. David Hanson, Mr. John Whittingdale and Mrs. Helen Liddell; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mrs. Liddell.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reason for disagreeing to Lords amendment No. 5 reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Data Protection Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

6.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a detailed, technical Bill, which has already been the subject of extensive debate in the other place. It implements the directive on data protection that was agreed in the European Union in 1995.

The draft directive, which was drawn up in 1990, was the subject of a good deal of discussion in the House. When it came up for discussion in European Standing Committee B in December 1994, serious reservations were expressed by both the then Government and the then Opposition. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) spoke for the Opposition. The directive was then improved, and the previous Government—Mr. Tom Sackville was the Minister—published a consultation document in March 1996. We are under an injunction in the directive to implement the directive in the form of legislation by October this year. The Bill would do that.

The Bill's detail can be the subject of discussion in Committee. However, I want to refer to a few important aspects where there are significant changes from the 1994 Data Protection Act, which itself implemented a 1981 Council of Europe convention on data protection. The first difference is that the Bill covers some manual records, which are known as structured manual records. It does not cover unstructured manual records. Hon. Members will be pleased to hear that, because in my experience that automatically excludes any record held by a Member of Parliament.

Clause 2 sets out special safeguards for the processing of sensitive personal data, including information about matters such as ethnic origin, political or religious opinions, health and sexual life. One important matter that has been raised with the Government—indeed, it was raised with me when I visited the United States in February—concerns the rules governing transfer of personal data to countries outside the European economic area. It is an important issue, which I hope will be discussed in some detail in Committee.

I know that there is come concern among certain of the European Union's trading partners, especially the United States, about how the word "adequacy" in the Bill will be interpreted in practice. Not all countries outside the EU have arrangements that meet the high standards in the directive, but I believe that our proposals for dealing with individual cases are sufficiently flexible to meet controllers' needs, while giving proper effect to the directive.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will my right hon. Friend explain what protection is available to an individual who provides information to a company which decides to sell it abroad? Does the individual have any veto on the information being sold abroad?

Mr. Straw: That is what the Bill and the directive seek to do. The Bill also seeks to deal with the issue of enforced third-party access to information held by data users. The broader question of third-country adequacy is being addressed in collective discussions in Brussels, and I am confident that a satisfactory way forward can be found.

The Government are committed to dealing with the problem of enforced subject access. Typically, that occurs where one person requires another to provide information in documentary form which can be obtained only by using the subject access route. That has been a means of accessing individuals' criminal records. The Data Protection Registrar strongly believes that this is wrong in principle, and, in another place, my noble and learned Friend Lord Williams indicated our acceptance in principle of what the registrar had said.

The matter is proving to be a very difficult nut to crack. The issues are complex, and, in some respects—certainly until part V of the Police Act is enforced—there will be a continuing need to ensure that there is access to individuals' criminal records. We are continuing to have discussions with the Data Protection Registrar and her staff. I hope that we can table the necessary amendments in Committee.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My right hon. Friend has just made an important statement. In Committee, will he ensure that sufficient flexibility exists in the legislation to take into account the rapidly changing scene—particularly his Department's use of processes such as data matching, which are very important in crime detection?

Mr. Straw: Yes, we will address that issue, and will listen with care. As we made clear in another place, we approach this matter in an entirely bipartisan way, and there has been excellent co-operation from the Opposition. We do not regard the Bill as perfect, but we have done our best. I am sure that it could be improved, and we look forward to receiving amendments from wherever they come.

Clause 28 was partly amended in the other place, against our advice. We are considering carefully whether there is any way in which we can limit the need for the original provision in clause 28, but we may have to table amendments in Committee.

Understandably, concern was expressed by the media about the way in which the Bill might impact on their rights. Detailed discussions have taken place with representatives of the media, particularly with Lord Wakeham. The conclusions of the discussions have been positive, and are expressed in clause 31. They achieved approbation from both sides of the House, and can be the subject of further discussion in Committee. I believe that they provide a satisfactory way forward, and they appear to have achieved widespread agreement.

In conclusion, I repeat that we regard this as an all-party matter, which we inherited from the previous Administration. It is an important but technical Bill. I look forward to the debate and to the reports of the proceedings in Committee.

6.43 pm

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): May I immediately tell the Home Secretary that we share his view that we ought to proceed in a bipartisan way? There has been a lot of consultation—which we welcomed—in another place, and we will seek to continue

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

in that constructive vein during our considerations. I agree that this is a technical Bill. Its principles are important, but I will not seek to get bogged down in the details at this stage. They can be examined in Committee, and I hope that that will be of help to the House.

We are pleased that the principles behind the Data Protection Act 1984 are largely reproduced in the Bill, with some additions. We consider that to be almost the necessary prerequisite to that bipartisan approach. Personal data, and the proper and accurate handling of those data, is important. Our constituents must be protected when people are tempted to misuse information. All of us will have had examples of constituents who have been greatly distressed because they could not find out what was held about them. In many cases, the information was inaccurate, and they had no means of changing it.

As the Home Secretary said, the directive emerged because different countries applied the data protection convention in different ways. The European Commission, as is its tendency, wanted to homogenise everything. We were not aware that the absence of a directive had had a negative effect on trade between member states, or was necessary to ensure fair competition within the Community. We did not believe that a directive was necessary to make the single market work. We did not vote for it, but we have it, and we are now under an obligation to see that it is put into our law.

That leads me to my first question, which can be explored in Committee. The House will want to know what steps are being taken by other countries. We have a tendency in this country to get ahead of the game, and to be conscientious in the implementation of directives. We then find that others—for a variety of reasons—are lagging behind, and our businesses find themselves at a disadvantage. We will want to know what progress is being made in other countries.

We want to know also how much gold-plating is in the Bill, over and above what is required by the directive. When the Labour party was in opposition, it regularly accused us of adding to legislation required by directives, and imposing extra burdens over and above those requirements. In Committee, we will want to explore how much of the Bill flows from the directive, and how much is an opportunity being taken by the Government to add other burdens.

The Home Office said that the directive has three intentions. First, it intends to harmonise data protection legislation throughout the EU. We would prefer a regime of minimum standards, but we will look at the Bill against that background. Secondly, the directive aims to protect the individual's rights and freedoms, particularly the right to privacy with regard to the processing of personal data. That is a matter of common ground between us. Thirdly, the directive facilitates the free flow of personal data within the EU in the interests of improving the operation of the single market. As I have said, we are not aware that the single market is being damaged, but we will bear that in mind.

Like the Home Secretary, I wish to mention a few articles as a tick-list to which we will return in Committee. Article 7 defines the individual's right to gain access to information. That is a very important right, which we will want to make sure is enshrined. Article 8 introduces the new concept of sensitive data. We will want to explore why such sensitive data might be held in the first place, and whether there are ways of regulating the holding and processing of personal data.

We must look at the range of exemptions in terms of revealing information. The Bill refers to the police, employers, health care services and lawyers. Other things occur to me. What about the notes I take in my political surgeries when constituents come to see me? Will they be covered by the Bill? What about the advice given by citizens advice bureaux to our constituents? There are a number of large issues relating to exemption which we will want to explore in some detail.

Article 9 states that member states must provide exemptions from data processing rules where the information is held solely for the purposes of journalism or literary expression. Like the Home Secretary, I have read the *Hansard* reports of the debates in another place, and I have talked to my noble Friend Lord Wakeham, whose general view of the article's appropriateness I share. I only wish that the Government had consulted as effectively on the Human Rights Bill as they clearly have on this Bill—they are belatedly doing so, for which we give them half a mark.

We recognise the importance of deferring legal recourse to post-publication—we shall sympathetically examine the Government's decision on that. The Home Secretary mentioned manual records and the concerns of the Data Protection Registrar, which we shall also want to consider further.

On enforcement, clause 41 is a replica of current legislation, but we welcome the Government's willingness to go further, as represented in clause 42, as that goes to the heart of ensuring privacy and confidence in the system. I hope that the Home Secretary will understand if, in Committee, we come back time and again to the question whether the procedures will elicit public confidence.

The final point to which I want to draw attention—the Home Secretary did not mention it—is the enormous cost to business and industry of implementing the Bill. According to the Government's figures—from the Data Protection Commissioner's office—£1.15 billion in non-recurring start-up costs and £750 million in recurring annual costs will be incurred. That is a huge burden on business. It will have an impact on competitiveness for those who compete and market not only within the United Kingdom but—unless there is a level playing field—internationally. That brings me back to where I started: if the Bill is gold-plated, there will not be a level playing field, and we shall add burdens to British business and industry that will not be replicated overseas.

We recognise the importance of technological advance and the need to change procedures to take account of it. We also recognise the importance of personal privacy, accuracy and access to information—in other words, confidence. On the whole, the 1984 Act commanded confidence, and the Bill must do the same—we shall work hard and constructively to ensure that it does. Its principles are right and unexceptional, and we will be so directed, when the time comes, to make a Second Reading judgment.

6.52 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The Liberal Democrats, too, welcome the Bill. Although it has been a long time in gestation, we believe that it should be dealt with with some urgency. It is an important piece of human rights legislation, fitting into a general pattern of reform, which will help to define privacy. We have some concerns, which I shall mention briefly, so that the Government have notice of them—obviously, I shall save the detail for Committee.

A couple of measures are still missing. First, the Home Secretary referred to enforced subject access, on which the Government gave a clear commitment to legislate in the framework of the Bill. We shall be disappointed if nothing is done about that; we favour the creation of a criminal offence.

Secondly, there should be an exemption on the holding of sensitive personal data on ethnicity for the purposes of ethnic monitoring. Clearly, great strides have been made in monitoring the work force, and we do not want the Bill to make such monitoring—when it is in the wider public interest—illegal. The Government made a commitment to create such an exemption in response to an amendment moved in another place by my noble Friend Lord Dholakia—we want them to act on that.

We want the Commissioner to have stronger powers, especially under clause 50, to be more proactive in identifying situations in which the principles are not being complied with. We have concerns about third-country standards, which the Home Secretary mentioned. Moreover, we believe that the media exemptions in clause 31 throw up wider questions, especially in the context of the Human Rights Bill. We are convinced neither that the notion of proportionality in considering the public interest is sufficiently incorporated, nor that clause 31 will stand up when the Human Rights Bill is enacted—we shall want to return to that matter.

We want the measures on data matching to go further; specific codes of conduct should be referred to and made compulsory. We shall also examine the issue of sensitive data that are held by bodies other than the police or the Secretary of State, as we believe that, for example, organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds should be able to hold information on wildlife offenders.

We believe that the Bill is sensible, but it is crucial that people register. We welcome the improvement of notification procedures, but, in searching through the information provided by the Data Protection Registrar, I noticed that only slightly more than 100 Members of Parliament are currently registered. I can tell the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) that the registrar has proposed new categories of data, including citizens advice bureaux records and the casework of Members of Parliament. I sent off my application form today, and I hope that registration will become more widespread as people become more aware of the issue.

6.55 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Because of the extraordinary lateness of the hour, I realise that I must condense my remarks on this important Bill, which owes its genesis and genius elsewhere—in our membership of the European Union.

I want to speak about only one measure, about which I have already teased the Home Secretary. The Bill originally contained a provision—clause 28(4)—which was deleted when the Government were defeated on an amendment moved by Baroness Nicholson in another place. However, the Government have said that the provision may be reintroduced in the House of Commons, which is why I want to highlight it now.

Clause 28(4) gave the Secretary of State the power by order to remove essential safeguards from unspecified classes of personal data. An order removing those rights could be made where it was thought necessary to prevent or detect crime, apprehend or prosecute offenders, or assess or collect tax.

The rights that would be set aside are: first, individuals' rights under clause 7 to obtain a copy of any data held about them—the so-called right of subject access; secondly, the first data protection principle, which requires that those processing data do so fairly and lawfully—the term "processing" includes the obtaining of personal information, the use made of it and its disclosure; thirdly, the so-called non-disclosure provisions, which consist of any of the other safeguards in the data protection principles that may prevent the disclosure of personal information.

The effect of a provision such as clause 28(4) would be drastic. It would allow bodies to obtain information illegally and entitle them deliberately to mislead the individual who asked how the information had been obtained, what use was being made of it, and to whom it was being disclosed.

There are three reasons why the proposal is objectionable. First, it is unnecessary. The preceding provisions—clause 28(1) to (3), which remain in the Bill—permit those safeguards to be set aside in any individual case where their application would prejudice law enforcement or tax collection. Clause 28(4) permitted those safeguards to be set aside in all cases, regardless of whether compliance would prejudice law enforcement or tax collection.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): As a result of the earlier decision, this matter is being considered, as the hon. Gentleman will know. I am more than happy to discuss it with him in detail before the Bill is considered in Committee.

Mr. Shepherd: I greatly appreciate that offer, which I shall indeed take up. I am not trying to talk out the Bill, as the Minister will understand; I want to highlight the issue, and ensure that the reasons behind the Government's decision to delete the measure are given.

My final point is that, in the past—over the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, for example—the Labour party expressed great concern about the ability to amend, by secondary legislation, primary legislation to which rights were inscribed. Having said that, however, I support the general thrust of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

DATA PROTECTION BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Data Protection Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any increase attributable to the Act in—

(i) the expenses of the Data Protection Registrar (renamed the Data Protection Commissioner by the Act),

(ii) any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in respect of the Data Protection Tribunal or the members of the Tribunal, and

(iii) any expenses incurred by a government department in complying with the requirements imposed on data controllers,

(b) any administrative expenses of the Secretary of State attributable to the Act, and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other Act are payable out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

Question agreed to.

DATA PROTECTION BILL [*LORDS*] [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That any Act resulting from the Data Protection Bill *[Lords]* may—

(a) require the payment of fees in connection with notification by, and the renewal of registration of, data controllers under the Act; and

(b) provide for the payment of those fees and other sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Legal Services

That the draft Institute of Legal Executives Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 12th March, be approved.

Value Added Tax (S.I., 1998, No. 762)

That the Value Added Tax (Supply of Services) (Amendment) Order 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 762), dated 17th March 1998, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.

Local Government Finance

That the Special Grant Report (No. 34): Metropolitan Railway Passenger Services Grant for 1998–99 (HC 656), which was laid before the House on 24th March, be approved.

Local Government Finance (Scotland)

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland): Grant in aid of expenditure on rail services in the Strathclyde Passenger Transport area (HC 660), which was laid before this House on 26th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. David Lock be discharged from the Deregulation Committee and Mr. Andy King to be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Mudie.]*

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Norman Baker be discharged from the European Legislation Committee and Mr. Colin Breed be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Mudie.]*

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee),

That the Welsh Grand Committee shall meet at County Hall, Carmarthen on Tuesday 5th May at Eleven o'clock to take questions under Standing Order No. 103, (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider the matter of the rural economy in Wales under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)) proceedings being interrupted at half-past Four o'clock—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

Question agreed to.

WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Mr. Elfyn Llwyd be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Mudie, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Lloyds TSB Bill *[Lords]* (*By Order*)

Order for Second Reading read.

7 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second Time.

It may be appropriate to declare an interest. I contribute to an insurance policy with Abbey Life, which is now wholly owned by Lloyds, and my wife contributes to a pension scheme originally with Target Life which I think went under the control of Abbey Life. Other than that, I have no registrable interests in relation to Lloyds TSB.

In December 1995, two of the United Kingdom's oldest and best-known financial services groups, TSB group and Lloyds bank, merged, with the aim of providing their customers with the widest possible branch network of services that was available from any high street bank. It may seem strange to some hon. Members that, despite securing the necessary regulatory and shareholder approval at the time of the merger, Lloyds TSB group, as it is now called, is required to promote this measure in Parliament.

Before dealing with the Bill's provisions and its recent parliamentary history, it may help if I sketch the background of the United Kingdom's current financial services marketplace, which has changed beyond recognition in the past 15 years. Cash-dispensing machines, credit and debit cards and telephone and even personal computer banking are fast becoming features of many people's everyday lives. Customers no longer expect to have to go to their high street bank at a time that is convenient to the bank. They expect the bank to come to them, and do not invariably expect even to have to walk across the threshold of a bank branch. They want the ease and convenience of knowing that they can pick up and use a telephone on a local rate number any time of the day or night. The two words that encapsulate that change are competition and technology, and the combination of the two is having a profound impact on the shape and structure of the financial services sector in the United Kingdom.

All the major players in the sector are bringing on line ever more sophisticated technologies to tailor their distribution systems to meet the changing and ever more sophisticated needs of their customers. For example, the supermarket chains Sainsbury and Tesco have become significant competitors in the new financial services environment. Sainsbury's bank now has £1.4 billion in deposits from 650,000 customers. Virgin already has more than £1 billion under management through its personal equity plans and pensions business, and intends to enter the banking marketplace later this year.

It seems that scarcely a day goes by without another company announcing its plans to enter the financial services sector. BMW, British Airways and Daihatsu are the latest in a long line of companies declaring an interest in the sector. The new entrants are playing a crucial role in irreversibly transforming the landscape of the UK's financial services sector, as well as representing a challenge to the major providers of retail financial services. We may legitimately question how substantial or sustainable is the challenge. Most of the new entrants are cherry-picking customers from the clearing banks by offering them a narrow range of products and services—and only those that they think will be highly profitable. It is not a universal service aimed at banking for all sections of the community, and nor do the new entrants intend that it should be. The new entrants are not able to offer the breadth of services and products or the specialised staff that traditional providers offer. They do not want to be saddled with the high infrastructure costs of providing an accessible and fully comprehensive banking service.

That naturally brings me to the sensitive issue of traditional fixed-branch networks. Footfall in branches—the number of customers using fixed branches—is falling year by year for all the major United Kingdom retail banks. As we know, the key drivers of that change are technological advances and increased competition.

In this new financial services climate, Lloyds TSB group, like its competitors, has needed to respond to rapidly changing customer preferences, and constantly needs to look at the shape of its branch network and at ways of delivering services to customers. One good example of that is that the bank has teamed up with Asda supermarkets, and the first Asda in-store bank providing the full range of TSB products opened in December. Six more pilots have since opened. However, Lloyds TSB is, and will remain, the most accessible bank in the United Kingdom. It has 2,700 branches nationwide—900 more than its nearest competitor. For TSB and Lloyds, the branch network is the bedrock of customer services.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I am listening with interest to my hon. Friend's explanation. Why did Lloyds close the only joint stock bank branch in Winlaton in the north-east where I live—a catchment area of some 12,000 potential customers—when there is no competition in the village? Was it just for profit?

Mr. Illsley: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. Perhaps when he has heard about the initiatives of which I shall speak shortly he will feel more comfortable with the Bill. Before becoming involved with the Bill, I met the banking unions and listened to their concerns about branch closures. Those concerns were addressed by Lloyds TSB to the unions' satisfaction. I shall shortly try to explain how Lloyds will address the issue of branch closures in areas where no other banks are available.

As I said, for TSB and Lloyds the branch network is the bedrock of customer service and the principal means of maintaining contact with customers in all parts of the United Kingdom. It is worth noting that, with just 500 branches each, competitors such as Sainsbury and Tesco fall short of offering the wide and well-balanced branch network that consumers value and that customers of TSB and Lloyds enjoy.

When Lloyds TSB has to close a branch, it goes the extra mile—unlike its competitors—to ensure that its customers continue to have easy access to basic money transaction facilities. Lloyds TSB attaches considerable importance to that, not just because it is a sound and commercially sensible judgment, but because it reflects the company's strongly held belief in corporate citizenship—the belief that social responsibility goes hand in hand with commercial success. The TSB movement, as I shall shortly explain, was founded with that principle at the heart of its business ethos.

In November 1997, Lloyds TSB announced an historic pilot project whereby its customers could cash cheques and withdraw money at selected post offices in their

[Mr. Illsley]

locality. The scheme has been so successful that Lloyds TSB intends to roll it out to 500 post offices nationwide. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) will take that point on board, and I will ask Lloyds TSB whether that pilot project will extend to his area.

Mr. McWilliam: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but we do not have a post office, either.

Mr. Illsley: I am afraid that my hon. Friend has got me on that one. It seems that he will have some problems in the future.

The project is good news not only for TSB and Lloyds but for the continuance of the country's post offices—apart from in Blaydon, of course—and will help to secure the future of branches in rural areas, which will continue to play an important role right at the heart of community life.

Before explaining in detail the merger of Lloyds TSB, I want briefly to describe the two companies and to say something of their respective backgrounds. The TSB movement was started in 1810 by the Rev. Henry Duncan in the small Dumfriesshire village of Ruthwell, as a means of improving the financial position of what were then termed the labouring classes.

One might think that there was an element of 19th-century paternalist do-gooding in that, but Henry Duncan's motivation was straightforward and genuine enough. As a result of his and others' endeavours, savings banks were established throughout the United Kingdom, and an early precursor of the savings culture that the Government want to build today was created. From the 1840s onwards, the savings banks' funds were secured by the Government—hence the name Trustee Savings bank.

Although the savings banks began to explore the possibility of providing commercial services in the 1920s, it took more than 50 years for them to come together to form a modern clearing bank in 1976. At flotation in 1986, there was a massive expansion of the company's equity base, as small shareholders, including many staff, began to share in the benefits of the business: 25,910 staff and company pensioners applied for a staggering 97 million shares.

By 1995, the TSB had grown to become one of the United Kingdom's leading bancassurers—that is, an integrated banking, life assurance and general assurance business—with branches throughout Britain.

Lloyds bank, or Taylors and Lloyds, as it then was, was founded in 1765 in Birmingham. By the 1880s, Lloyds was a major banking force in the midlands, and looked increasingly towards London. In fact, as long ago as 1771, the sons of the founding Birmingham partners had opened a bank in Lombard street in the City of London, and in 1884 that business was combined with the mainstream bank. Recently, the group acquired Abbey Life and the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society.

Before I explain why the group needs a private Bill, I want to give the House a renewed assurance on the separate status for the TSB in Scotland. Lloyds TSB has asked me to confirm that TSB Scotland's separate and special status, as provided for in the undertakings given to Parliament by the then TSB group in 1985, will continue to be honoured.

At the first annual general meeting of the new Lloyds TSB group in Edinburgh on 11 April 1996, Sir Robin Ibbs, the group's former chairman, said:

"there will be no change in the status of TSB Bank Scotland . . . its Chairman will sit on the main group Board . . . the TSB Bank Scotland will remain headquartered in Edinburgh, and the Lloyds TSB Group will have its registered office in Scotland".

The group is committed to employing about 4,000 staff in Scotland, and last year expanded its business operations by opening 13 TSB and three Lloyds business banking centres to service the needs of the Scottish small business community. Only last week, the group's annual general meeting was held in Glasgow. I hope that that will reassure Scottish Members that Lloyds TSB is committed to serving all its customers in Scotland.

The need for a private Bill arises from the fact that a bank may not transfer a customer's money to another body without the customer's consent. Only through a private Bill can a bank's operations be merged without its going through the massive administrative task, and uncertainty, of seeking the agreement of each customer individually to a transfer of his or her account from one entity to another. In this way, 7 million TSB customers are also spared the accompanying inconvenience. That is the recognised way of dealing with bank mergers, and an average of one bank Bill each parliamentary Session testifies to that fact.

The Bill provides for the transfer to and vesting in Lloyds of the undertakings of TSB and Hill Samuel. Clause 3 allows the directors of Lloyds to name an appointed day on which those undertakings will be transferred to Lloyds and to name different days for each undertaking and for different parts of each undertaking. Clause 4 provides that, on the appointed day for an undertaking, it will transfer to and vest in Lloyds, which will in effect step into the shoes of TSB and Hill Samuel.

The rest of the Bill is designed to ensure that the transfer is effective, so that, once TSB and Hill Samuel have been transferred to Lloyds, Lloyds will be in the same position vis-a-vis third parties as TSB or Hill Samuel were before the transfer. By the same token, third parties that have dealings with TSB or Hill Samuel before the transfer will be no better and no worse off in their dealings with Lloyds.

Clause 6 contains supplementary provisions, including subsection (5), to the effect that any account between a customer and TSB or Hill Samuel will become an account between that customer and Lloyds after the appointed day. Clause 7 provides for contracts of employment, notably ensuring that, following the transfer, any contract of employment with TSB or Hill Samuel becomes a contract with Lloyds, as if the employment were a single, continuing employment.

Clause 8 relates to retirement benefit schemes, although it should be noted that it has no effect on the TSB group pension scheme, which is not part of the business or undertaking of Hill Samuel or TSB that is being transferred into Lloyds.

The Bill made steady progress through the other place. It received its First Reading in January 1997 and its Second Reading in March 1997. Following the general election and the summer recess, it went to the Committee on Unopposed Bills in November 1997, and received its Third Reading on 19 January this year.

As some hon. Members are aware, Lloyds TSB undertook exhaustive and free-ranging discussions about its future relationship with the Banking, Insurance and

Finance Union, BIFU, and the Lloyds TSB Union, LTU, as soon as the merger was announced. It successfully concluded agreements with both unions, to each party's satisfaction, during last year's summer recess.

The most significant features of the agreements were: equal recognition rights for BIFU and LTU in both the TSB and Lloyds banks; compulsory redundancy continuing to be a policy of last resort, with any necessary reductions in jobs coming from natural turnover, redeployment and voluntary means whenever possible; improvements when harmonising terms and conditions and guarantees on how the new terms will apply to new members of staff; and an agreed process for proposed branch reductions, whereby both unions are notified six months before any such closure.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Can my hon. Friend give us any assurance about what the agreed programme of closures might be in the short to medium term?

Mr. Illsley: I am sorry that I am unable to assist my hon. Friend in that matter now, but I am sure that I will be able to do so in correspondence. As far as I am aware, there will be closures, but Lloyds TSB has agreed the procedures with the banking unions. I also met the unions to discuss the issue and ensure that they were satisfied with what Lloyds TSB had proposed. Both the banking unions were happy with the suggested procedures for branch closures. Perhaps my hon. Friend can seek the unions' assurances.

Mr. Cousins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but he will recognise that, as representatives, we must be concerned—like my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam)—about the impact on the services to our constituents and constituencies of a programme of branch closures. That is an entirely separate issue from whatever assurances may have passed between the banking unions and, now, their employers.

Mr. Illsley: I share my hon. Friend's concern. In my constituency, a TSB and a Lloyds branch are in close proximity. Obviously, it would make sense for the merged company to merge the two branches, closing one. However, we are talking about a de facto merger that took place two years ago. The Bill would simply give it legal status.

As I said, Lloyds has piloted a scheme to provide banks within branches of the Asda supermarket chain, and with the Post Office, to widen as far as possible access to the services that my hon. Friend's constituents desire through the widest possible network.

Mr. Cousins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again; it may be best for us to proceed by means of a dialogue, rather than by making speeches. My hon. Friend briefly referred to the acquisition of the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society. Can he give the House some assurance about what the attitude of Lloyds TSB will be to the future of mutual institutions and to the employment and assets locked up in them?

Mr. Illsley: That matter is not affected by the Bill. The acquisition of the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society was based on the premise that it had a cost-income ratio of 26 per cent., making it the cheapest and most efficient building society in the United Kingdom—hence the interest of Lloyds TSB. In comparison, at the time of demutualisation the Halifax building society had a cost-income ratio approaching 50 per cent. One can therefore see the advantages of buying the Cheltenham and Gloucester.

The point was to have that mortgage service—perhaps the most efficient of any building society—available to Lloyds TSB branches throughout the country; ultimately, it might then be available through supermarket branches and post offices. The acquisition was intended to make efficient, low-cost mortgages available to Lloyds TSB customers. As far as I am aware, at present demutualisation of the Cheltenham and Gloucester is not a policy. I may be able to reassure my hon. Friend further on that point in correspondence.

As I was saying, the relevant features of the agreements include an agreed process for proposed branch reductions, whereby both unions are notified six months before any proposed closure, and a reaffirmation of the assurances previously given regarding the TSB in Scotland. Against the background of the agreements reached with the unions and the assurances given to them, the unions withdrew their petitions after Second Reading in the other place.

During that period, pensions were discussed with the unions, and the Lloyds TSB group assured both unions that the benefits of the separate Lloyds and TSB pension schemes would remain unaffected by the Bill. The non-contributory elements of the schemes are some of the best funded in the United Kingdom and they provide an excellent package of benefits to pensioners. In addition to the strength of funding, the schemes—as one would expect from a major financial service provider—enjoy a comprehensive framework of statutory, regulatory and fiduciary safeguards for their beneficiaries.

The natural fit between TSB and Lloyds is multiplied in a geographical context. TSB has a concentration of branches in Scotland and the north of England, while Lloyds is strong in the south and west of England. However, the logic behind the merger was not merely one of geographical reach. Lloyds has a long tradition of providing business services for small and medium businesses, while TSB, with its tradition as a savings institution, has a particular expertise and strong presence in the personal account market.

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): The hon. Gentleman referred to the pension arrangements and, as I understood it, said that those were satisfactory. Can he explain why there is such widespread concern about the pension arrangements of Hill Samuel TSB former employees? We are talking about a company that now has a massive revenue—£3 billion, I think—with £1 billion in its pension fund and a tax holiday until at least 2015 for current employees, yet many of us have been told that former employees of Hill Samuel TSB are having to apply for welfare benefits.

Mr. Illsley: I hope to be able to deal with that issue later, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that meetings have taken place as recently as this lunchtime and this afternoon at which the concerns of the Hill Samuel action group, which numbers about 200 people, were addressed by Lloyds TSB. The action group proposed the use of the Hill Samuel pension surplus. Those pensions are unaffected by the Bill and are not part of the assets that

[Mr. Illsley]

are being transferred, but a separate entity. The action group asked to use about £500 million of the surplus available in the Hill Samuel scheme.

A few years ago, I requested from the Opposition side that the surplus from the mineworkers pension scheme be used for the benefit of former mineworkers who were on low pensions and had not been able to earn sufficient from the pensions scheme, which started in 1961, to live well. As the hon. Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) may recall, the previous Government refused that request. On privatisation of the coal industry, the surplus went straight into the Government's hands.

This issue is similar, and it is the one with which Goode committee dealt a few years ago. That committee was set up after the Maxwell pensions affair. Its recommendation was simply that a surplus in a pension scheme should be notionally owned by the organisation that supports the deficit; in other words, if the employer has to make good the deficit on any pension scheme, he takes responsibility for the surplus.

The action group's request for £500 million was unrealistic and against the recommendations of the Goode committee. The pensions of Hill Samuel pensioners are on average £12,000 per annum compared with the UK average of £4,700. I think that the Lloyds average pension payment is about £7,000 per annum. Those average payments show that the Hill Samuel pensioners are perhaps not as low-paid as the hon. Gentleman suggests. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth)—who I see wants to intervene—and the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) today met the deputy chief executive and members of Lloyds TSB. They have been sent a letter that deals with many of the concerns of the Hill Samuel action group.

The letter refers to the position of pensioners on low incomes. Lloyds TSB maintains that it shares the concern that exists. In fact, the company makes ex gratia payments, not out of the pension scheme but out of its funding, to pensioners on poorer pensions—those over 75 with more than 10 years' service. The payments come out of the bank's profit and loss account and not the pensions scheme, which is not reduced by them.

Lloyds TSB states in the letter that it is "sympathetic", that it is

"seeking to improve the position of such pensioners",

that it wants to ensure that any additional payments are not affected by the removal of social security benefits on a pound-for-pound basis, and that it will

"undertake a comprehensive review to examine the position of such pensioners in order to determine how their pensions can be increased within Inland Revenue guidelines and without reducing their Social Security entitlements . . . We anticipate that the review will take approximately six months to complete."

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The hon. Gentleman accurately said that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and I had a very long meeting with senior executives of the bank. It needs to be put firmly on the record that, although the action group suggested that a substantial part of the pension fund surplus should be used to ameliorate the position of poorly paid pensioners, that was an opening gambit to try to get the bank to talk and resolve the issue as quickly as possible. The bank's ex gratia payments averaged about £460. We are not talking about a huge sum. I believe that that was a lump sum.

Mr. Illsley: It is more than the mineworkers get. We asked for their pension fund surplus to be used to provide better benefits for mineworkers. They did not get ex gratia payments at all.

We must consider what the action group is asking for in context. The whole matter was debated at the time of the Goode committee. In opposition, I called for the previous Government to divvy up the surplus in the mineworkers pension scheme for the betterment of the lower-paid pensioners. My request was refused by the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported.

Mr. Howarth: In my previous incarnation, I represented a number of mineworkers. I think that I would have supported the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Illsley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would have spoken well in support of the mineworkers in his previous incarnation.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Can the hon. Gentleman say whether the negotiations with my hon. Friends the Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) are part of the statement issued by the promoters, or a new development resulting from the blocking motion?

Mr. Illsley: They are not a result of the blocking motion. There have been some half a dozen meetings between Lloyds TSB and the Hill Samuel action group. I think that the last took place on 16 April. Lloyds TSB has tried to meet the action group and identify the issues that it wants to raise. The hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Aldershot raised concerns as recently as today. The negotiations are not a consequence of the blocking motion, because the meetings took place before it was tabled.

Mr. Brooke: I see no specific allusion to the continuing negotiations in the statement issued on behalf of the promoters in support of the Second Reading of the Bill. The hon. Gentleman is moving Second Reading, so I do not think that this matter should be dealt with in a winding-up speech.

Mr. Illsley: The Hill Samuel action group and the Hill Samuel pensions are not part of the Bill, and therefore cannot be part of the statement. The negotiations took place alongside the passage of the Bill but, because they are not part of the Bill, they are not in the statement. The assets transferred under clause 8 are the assets of the Hill Samuel bank and the TSB bank, not the pension schemes, which stand alone and remain so within the group. I hope that that answers the right hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Cousins: I have been following the discussion closely. Does my hon. Friend agree that the presentation of the issues in paragraph 22 of the statement is less full than it should have been in these circumstances, and that it would lead hon. Members to conclude that those issues were irrelevant or had been completely resolved, when they were still under negotiation?

Mr. Illsley: I believe that the statement was put together last week in preparation for this debate. It was

sent to the Vote Office to be ready and available for hon. Members this evening. The negotiations continued as recently as today. I have a copy of the letter sent to the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Aldershot. With their agreement, a copy can be made available to my hon. Friend. It met many of the concerns of hon. Members who supported the action group.

Mr. McWilliam: Some hon. Members are worried that the explanation that we have been given seems to fly in the face of the realities of the fiduciary duties of pension scheme trustees. As a former chairman of a pension scheme, I am well aware of them. Paragraph 15 states:

"The assets do not form part of the assets of either TSB or Hill Samuel."

Such assets are not allowed to do so under the law of the land. The trustees should control the assets for the benefit of the beneficiaries of the schemes and not for the benefit of anyone else. Given the statement and what we have heard so far, I believe that there is concern that that may not necessarily happen.

Mr. Illsley: I reassure my hon. Friend that the pension assets are not transferred by the Bill. They are not in the Bill. He is right to say that the trustees of the schemes are responsible for the pension scheme and have those duties. The scheme that is the subject of the action group is not in the Bill. As I tried to point out, Lloyds TSB Group has tried as far as possible to accommodate the concerns of the action group and of hon. Members who have added their names to the blocking motion. The letter sent today to the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Aldershot reflects the outcome of their long meeting with Lloyds TSB's deputy chief executive, and can be made available. That letter addresses those anxieties.

Pensioners on low incomes are the concern of the action group. The letter from the deputy chief executive refers to

"a comprehensive review to examine the position of such pensioners in order to determine how their pensions can be increased within Inland Revenue guidelines . . . We anticipate that the review will take approximately six months to complete".

On security of pension schemes, the letter says that Lloyds TSB is

"concerned to ensure that the position of pensioners remains fully protected in all circumstances. As you know, there is a comprehensive framework of statutory, fiduciary and fiscal protections in place for members of all of our pension schemes, for the benefit of scheme members."

It is all in the letter, and reflects the meeting this lunchtime.

Mr. McWilliam: My hon. Friend does not understand. There are two problems. First, if the Bill becomes law, the company trustees on the pension scheme, who will form a majority, will be appointed by the new company. Secondly, the company contributions to those schemes could be adjusted. That has happened before. British Telecom took a pensions holiday instead of transferring the benefits to the beneficiaries. That could easily happen in this case. There is nothing in the Bill to prevent that or to prevent the management from appointing the chief executive, who may be a member of the scheme, and giving him a massive salary the year before he retires; suddenly, he will have raided the scheme. There are no safeguards. My hon. Friend must address those points.

Mr. Illsley: With the best will in the world, I am trying to address them. The pension schemes are not in the Bill. They are unaffected; before and after the Bill, they remain the same. Lloyds has given the assurance that the pension schemes will remain unaffected. The fears voiced by my hon. Friend, although legitimate, are not real.

To address the point that was the subject of the blocking motion, Lloyds is trying to deal with the issues raised by the action group, such as the problem of low-paid pensioners under the Hill Samuel, Target Life and other pension schemes. Lloyds is very conscious of pensions issues. That was shown by the meetings over the past few weeks—as late as this lunchtime—and by the letter that has been made available. I have gone as far as I can to reassure hon. Members that the pensions remain unchanged.

Sir Raymond Whitney: The hon. Gentleman is resting much of his case on the fact that the £1 billion-plus pension scheme is distinct from and not part of the Bill, and we accept that technical point. However, when the House considers the ramifications of the new development, it is entirely germane for us to take account of the fact that the present employees of Lloyds TSB are to give themselves a tax holiday until at least 2015; at the same time, we are informed that several former employees of Hill Samuel and TSB are suffering to the point where they have to have recourse to social security benefits to supplement an extremely meagre pension; and that is happening against a background where, for example, the chief executive and senior executives of the former Hill Samuel were awarded significant pension and salary increases. The technicality of the pension fund not being part of the Bill is not enough to satisfy the concerns that have been expressed and echoed by hon. Members on both sides of the House this evening.

Mr. Illsley: I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point; however, it is not a technicality but a fact of life that the pension schemes do not fall within the Bill and are not affected by it—they remain as they are. There will be a pensions holiday, as there are in many well-funded pension schemes—in the case of the mineworkers pension scheme, British Coal took both a pensions holiday and the surplus from the scheme. It is not unknown for there to be surpluses in pension schemes.

The point which I am trying to make is that the pension schemes are unaffected, but the concerns that have been raised by the Hill Samuel action group have been taken into account by Lloyds as far as possible. Lloyds has repeatedly asked the Hill Samuel action group to provide details of the anomalies referred to in the letters circulated to hon. Members, but, as recently as today, the action group has not come forward with a single example. Lloyds has repeatedly asked for information on those anomalies.

The hon. Member for Aldershot is holding up a piece of paper, but why does he not send it to Lloyds? Why did he not give it to Lloyds today? Why has information on the anomalies not been made available? Hon. Members have had the opportunity to raise those issues with Lloyds, as has the action group, but at a meeting on 16 April, those anomalies were not presented.

I am trying to get the message through that Lloyds is addressing the issues. Conservative Members have received a letter from Mike Fairey, the deputy chief executive of Lloyds. Lloyds is trying to address the issues, which are in a sense separate from the pension scheme,

[Mr. Illsley]

which is unaffected by the Bill. The Hill Samuel action group is using the passage of the Bill to try to address its members' concerns about their pensions, but the Hill Samuel pension scheme does not come within the Bill. As I have pointed out, the average Hill Samuel pension is £12,000 per annum, compared with a national average occupational pension of £4,700. When the Hill Samuel action group comes forward with some concrete examples as part of the review offered by Lloyds, I am sure that they will be taken into account.

I have digressed a little from my speech, but in doing so I hope that I have addressed the concerns of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members. I was talking about the geographical and business set-up of Lloyds TSB and the merger. The TSB, with its tradition as a savings institution, has particular expertise and a strong presence in the personal account market; Lloyds is a strong player in the retail mortgage market after the Cheltenham and Gloucester acquisition; and TSB possesses a successful general insurance underwriting business. The natural synergies between the two banks have turned Lloyds TSB into the most successful financial services group in the European Union.

Generally, the group's staff have seen their job prospects improve as there are broader career opportunities for those working within a stronger organisation. They have also gained through the rising share price of the company: 70,000 members of the group staff and pensioners are members of the company's save-as-you-earn scheme for buying shares.

Lloyds TSB's 15 million customers have also gained significantly from the merger. They now enjoy access to the largest branch and cash-dispensing machine network in the United Kingdom: Lloyds TSB has 2,700 branches—30 per cent. more than its nearest competitor—and 4,220 cash-dispensing machines. Customers have the use of both TSB and Lloyds cash machines without charge and access to Cheltenham and Gloucester building society mortgages in both Lloyds and TSB branches.

For business customers, the group's combined spread of business centres will enhance the service provided to business users, especially small businesses. In parts of the country where TSB is under-represented, TSB small business managers will work from Lloyds bank branches offering small business services to TSB customers; previously, that service was not generally available.

Lloyds TSB's business is rooted in local communities throughout the United Kingdom, and it believes that it has a responsibility to help the communities it also serves as a business. If communities are affected by economic and social deprivation, so too is the health of Lloyds TSB's business. Lloyds TSB foundation will this year distribute £21.1 million, making it the largest grant-making body in the UK after the Diana Princess of Wales fund. The work of the foundation focuses on supporting charities, especially small, local grass-roots charities, which enable people—especially disadvantaged and disabled people—to play a fuller role in society.

That support ranges from pensioners clubs in Newnham to a disabled access co-ordinator at the British museum. In 1997, more than 3,300 local charities received support from the foundations. The group also positively encourages staff fundraising through a matched giving scheme. From sponsored sheep shearing to bed races, the group matches staff fund-raising activities pound for pound; in 1997, £900,000 was raised for the community in that way.

Lloyds TSB has been working closely with the Department for Education and Employment since the end of 1996, having seconded members of its staff to the DfEE, to ensure that new deal applicants have every possible opportunity to work for Lloyds TSB. Lloyds TSB plays a significant role in supporting the education system: 600 members of its staff are school governors, so it is not surprising to hear that the group is developing a qualification for school governors in partnership with Essex county council's governor development team.

In addition to all that, Lloyds TSB is promoting excellence in schools through its "quality in education" programme. The business excellence model used extensively with Lloyds TSB has been adapted for use in 300 schools and colleges through a pilot programme. Lloyds TSB has worked in partnership with more than 30 local education authorities to increase excellence in schools. In another move to promote a progressive approach in pursuit of academic excellence, Lloyds bank has initiated an education service "next steps" pack aimed at 16 to 18-year-olds in school. It combines traditional student notes with an interactive CD-ROM designed to prepare students for university life.

It is not only in pursuit of broadening and deepening the skill base that Lloyds TSB makes its mark; the group is also active on the rugby field and has recently begun a three-year sponsorship of rugby union. As part of that programme, the group is supporting rugby's development in Welsh schools and, in the near future, that programme will be rolled out to include England and Scotland as well.

Lloyds TSB is one of the largest companies in the United Kingdom, and is also one of Britain's world-beating companies. Its support for grass-roots community-based projects is unrivalled by any other UK company. It leads the City in its support for the Government's welfare-to-work initiative. It is creating wealth for the country—more than £500 million in tax went to the Treasury this year—for its staff, for its customers and for its shareholders, 70,000 of whom are members of staff.

The merger between Lloyds and TSB is supported by more than 80,000 staff, 15 million customers, 1 million shareholders, the Bank of England and both staff unions—the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union and the Lloyds TSB Union. By anyone's standards, that adds up to overwhelming public support for the merger, and I look to the House to allow 15 million stakeholders to gain from the merger of Lloyds and TSB.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that, although I have allowed a number of lengthy interventions on the question of pensions, pensions are not the principal subject of tonight's debate, which is the Second Reading of a different matter.

7.48 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): As the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) explained at length, the Bill's purpose is to complete the merger between Lloyds and TSB and, as I understand the position, it especially concerns the use of premises, the

rationalisation of premises, and the ability of staff from either side to operate mutually from either Lloyds or TSB premises. I believe that, for reasons best known to Parliament, banking is the only industry for which a private Act of Parliament is required in the event of a merger.

I crave your indulgence a little, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to explain how my involvement came about. A constituent is one of the main parties leading the TSB Hill Samuel action group. I became involved in supporting the blocking motion as a result of an investigation of the points raised by the group.

I believe that there is a technical issue as to whether there is a locus standi in relation to the Bill. I read out the advice of an eminent law firm, to the effect that the purpose of clause 8(2) of the Bill is indeed

"to rationalise the pension schemes of Lloyds and TSB with the logical consequence that all schemes be merged at a future date."

Therefore, although there is legal controversy as to what clause 8 is about and its precise relevance, there is a legal case that part of this merger Bill touches on the arrangements relating to the pension schemes—and the ability to merge the pension schemes. When merging two significant businesses, it is good practice—in terms of corporate governance, if nothing else—to study the pension schemes and ensure that the arrangements are satisfactory. If one does not do so, one is bound to receive complaints later when, inevitably, the pension schemes are merged.

Three separate issues regarding the pension arrangements worry me. The first is that of poor pensioners, who are drawing social security when the pension scheme has a surplus of about £850 million. The second is to what extent the TSB pension scheme is effectively ring-fenced in future; and the third is the extent to which there are anomalous cases, within the TSB scheme, where treatment had differed among categories of staff who had either had their employment transferred or who were deferred pensioners because they had been made redundant.

The letter that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and I have received, following a further meeting this morning, goes a reasonable way to addressing those issues. Looking beyond that, it also raises quite an important point for the House, because among the crucial issues is the extent to which pension schemes can address the issue of poor pensioners within the Inland Revenue rules.

Practices appear to differ somewhat—depending on which Inland Revenue officers the arrangements are being discussed with—as to the extent to which the implications of the two-thirds rule can be waived when people are on a very low income. However, I confirm that the Lloyds TSB management have—to my mind, in good faith—carried out a full investigation and undertaken, in good faith, to negotiate, as best they can, with the Revenue to the advantage of pension scheme members, in order to address the issue of poor pensioners within the pension scheme.

Similarly, the law already goes a long way to protect the interests of one group—in this case, TSB pensioners—but there is in that letter an undertaking that we had requested. It makes a proposal that is healthy and correct in relation to a business that is likely to have many deferred pensioners. The proposal is that Lloyds TSB should consider appointing a trustee who represents deferred pensioners, so that the board of trustees and of the pension scheme is more fully representative of all participants in that scheme.

Mr. Cousins: I am extremely interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Is he in a position, as a result of the discussions that he has had, to give the House an assurance that there will be such a trustee, or is that still to be negotiated and agreed?

Mr. Flight: I am certainly not in a position to give such an undertaking—I am not part of the management of Lloyds TSB. However, to that suggestion, the response by Lloyds TSB has been:

"we will also consider the possibility of the appointment of a deferred pensioner to the board of the TSB pension scheme"

in the light of a suggestion that we made. I should like to think that, when the Bill passes into Committee, Lloyds TSB can make a firmer commitment, having at this stage undertaken to consider the proposal. I believe that the response was in good faith, and that the point was seen that the business has very many deferred pensioners, and that it is appropriate that they should be represented on the board of trustees.

Anomalies appear to exist between people who have been made redundant at similar levels of seniority and among people whose employment has been transferred. There is a further issue as to whether women employees have been treated on an equal basis to male employees. The undertaking by Lloyds is that the TSB Hill Samuel action group will be invited, with its support, to invite anyone who feels that they are an anomaly—that they have not been treated fairly—to present their case to Lloyds TSB. Lloyds TSB will appoint a specific officer suitable in terms of actuarial expertise and knowledge of the pension fund to prepare the material and to look into such cases, and the management have also said that they will undertake to furnish full evidence to the pensions ombudsman if internal agreement cannot be reached.

I am not entirely clear whether the pension ombudsman is the ideal party to be the ultimate referee in such a matter, or whether it would be more appropriate to have an independent actuary. However, those are the three key issues relating to the position of TSB pensioners that arise because, although the major purpose of the Bill is the merging of premises and operations, beneath it, and to some extent included in it, are measures for the merger of the pension schemes.

The objectives of the TSB Hill Samuel action group were to address three specific problems: poor pensioners; anomalies; and ring-fencing protection. The responses from Lloyds TSB go a long way, and probably about as far as one can go practically, for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central. In Committee, I hope that we shall be able to monitor progress. Lloyds has undertaken to advise my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot and me of the anomalies that come up and how they have been dealt with.

The most important reasons behind my initiation of the blocking motion have, at the very last hour, been dealt with reasonably by Lloyds TSB. Therefore, I have no wish to stand in the way of the wider rationalisation of the business that is the essential purpose of the Bill. Still, I hope that the House will have the opportunity to review progress on some aspects of what has been promised when the Bill reaches Committee.

8 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I declare an interest as a customer of the Trustee Savings bank of more than 30 years. I also draw to the attention of the House the fact that the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union supports my constituency. I am not aware of any involvement by that organisation in Lloyds TSB, nor have I received any representations from it. I merely draw attention to the fact in the interests of openness.

The House rarely gets an opportunity to discuss the rapidly developing nitty-gritty of our financial services. I hope that, as Government legislation proceeds in this Session and the next, we may have other opportunities to return to those matters. It is sometimes necessary for hon. Members to use opportunities such as this to bring before the House matters that can appear arcane; indeed, the whole procedure might be described as a contrivance. Be that as it may, if this is the only opportunity we have, then we must use it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) have already mentioned the importance of the Lloyds TSB merger. It is a significant financial institution, not just to this country but across the world. In this House, we have all too few opportunities to discuss those great financial institutions. The Bill comes before us at a time when global financial services are exploding, and there is a great deal of volatility and uncertainty around. It is thus entirely proper that hon. Members should raise the concerns of particular communities, constituencies and individuals in the context of such spectacular institutional developments.

In the light of the discussions that I have had with my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central and of the information that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs has given us, I do not feel the need to go into the subject in any great detail; I simply register the point that it is entirely proper that Members should use these opportunities to force some discussion.

This is by no means a trivial matter. In the context of the emergence of a single group of employees and the amalgamation of property, it is quite understandable that hon. Members should wish to discuss the importance of branch networks to their communities—not to mention the employment created by those networks and the services that they represent. It is beyond dispute that Lloyds and TSB branches sit side by side, so we are entitled to seek an assurance from the promoters that employment will not be lost as a result of the Bill.

What we have been told tonight, and common sense, shows us that some employment will be lost as a result of the merger. We are entitled to press the case of the employees, and to make the point that any reduction in those networks, and in the services they represent and the employment they create, should be kept to an absolute minimum—especially at a time when the Government are proposing imaginative developments in an area of financial services in which Lloyds TSB may want to play a part. I hope that, by the time that the Bill returns to us, there will be a general outline of the assurances we seek.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central referred to the acquisition of the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society. Many Members are extremely worried about the integrity of the remaining insurance and building society mutual institutions. What will be the likely attitude of this huge merged institution to the acquisition of such mutual institutions? What will be the general strategy of the merged institution to the integrity and independence of the remaining mutuals? We need some answers before the Bill enters Committee.

Of course, one can see the financial advantages to Lloyds TSB of being able to acquire a building society; that enables it to offer a wider range of services, including mortgages. We are nevertheless entitled to ask the promoters about their longer-term intentions to the acquisition of mutual institutions, whether in the insurance or the building society sectors. We have been given some welcome signs of the intentions of the merged institution this evening—for instance, the creation of a pilot scheme allowing access to savings and financial services through the Post Office. We are entitled to ask for more information of that kind: how does the scheme fit in with some of the Government's proposals to extend the habit of saving to parts of the population that have no net financial assets at all? Again, I hope to have some information about the attitude of Lloyds TSB to those issues before the Bill returns to us in Committee.

During the past week, the Government have made some welcome proposals in Newcastle for health action zones and education action zones—this in a city with a long history of commitment to the TSB and the trustee savings bank movement. I am entitled to press the case for some specific commitments on the part of Lloyds TSB to those Government initiatives, both in my city and on Tyneside generally. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central and the promoters of the Bill will take due note of my remarks.

In my closing remarks, I return to the subject of pensions. I am conscious of your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they do not directly and explicitly form part of the topic of the Bill, and I shall not dwell on them unduly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central made clear in his appropriate and general riposte to Opposition Members, there is a principle behind the specific proposals: that pension funds are not simply financial assets to be deployed by their owners in any way that may be chosen. They are the deferred income of the contributors.

That is the principle that we established in the Goode Committee report. That is the principle, to which my hon. Friend correctly referred, that was at issue in the mineworkers pension scheme changes that he so much, and in my view properly, regrets. That is the principle that we must preserve. If it produces some apparent peculiarities—there may be pension funds that are asset-rich—so be it, but the principle must be preserved, because it means so much not just for the employees of Hill Samuel and Lloyds TSB, but for pensioners everywhere. Hon. Members should not take the matter lightly or pass up an opportunity to register the point.

A particularly significant aspect of the proposals is the need to respect the rights and interests of deferred pensioners. In today's flexible labour market, deferred pensioners are becoming an ever-growing client body of pension schemes whose proper interests are too little recognised and too often ignored. The sign that there may be a specific representative of the interests of deferred pensioners on the trustee bodies of the pension scheme is important. I hope that that will happen.

In my attitude to Second Reading, I shall be guided by the remarks of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs. I shall bear in mind the account that he gave of his discussions today with Lloyds TSB. That will greatly influence my actions tonight.

The subject matter that forms part of the Bill is not some arid technical detail. There are important human principles involved that matter to many hon. Members. If the debate has given hon. Members on both sides an opportunity to raise those matters and to register those points with a great financial institution, the House of Commons will indeed have been doing its duty.

8.12 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Like several hon. Members, I was drawn to the debate by the concerns of the action group, and its members in my constituency and in the constituencies of my parliamentary colleagues. It has become clear from the debate, especially from the effective contribution that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), that there is a wider context that we must address—the merger process in the banking sector, and its implications.

Some of the forces driving that process are inevitable or desirable, and we should endorse those factors. An enormous process of technological change is clearly under way, and it is altering the face of retail banking. I have in my constituency the multimedia centre of one of the big banks that is developing internet banking, which will make much of the face-to-face contact in retail banking superfluous in years to come. In addition, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central described, an international process is taking place. What used to be a national industry is becoming international. That helps to explain the logic behind the Bill coming before the House.

We should not be deceived into taking such matters on the nod. There is undoubtedly a purely financial phenomenon taking place. There is at present a shareholder bubble in the financial sector which has driven bank shares up to extremely high and probably unsustainable levels, in the process making shareholders very well off, but fuelling the merger mania that surrounds the financial sector, often with questionable benefit.

It has been suggested that the House has a unique constitutional role in looking at merger activity in the financial services sector. No one has explained to me as a new Member how that originated, but it seems to me to be a valuable part of the scrutiny process, and we should take advantage of it.

It seems a little odd that, in such a major merger, the only legal considerations that have been entered into hitherto are the interests of the shareholders and the directors. It is a good discipline to ask whether customers benefit. The House is effectively being asked to deliver the customers, and we should act for them. It is not entirely clear that bank customers have benefited from merger activity in the past. Customers have often experienced slipshod services and rising costs, and that should be questioned. That is part of the scrutiny process in the House tonight.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and others have dealt well with the pensions issue. The hon. Gentleman made a useful distinction between the concerns of the present—concerns about past disparities between different groups of pensioners in the TSB Hill Samuel fund and the poor pensioners, and the ring-fencing problem.

There is a little more to be said about the ring-fencing issue. There will be serious challenges to the trustees of the pension fund in future from two directions in particular. First, if this bank merger proceeds like most others, waves of redundancy will follow. Many current bank employees will be made redundant. The issue of deferred pensions and the need to protect them will be important.

The second issue, which the hon. Gentleman did not mention, is that this is probably not the end of mergers and acquisitions in the retail banking sector. There is already a good deal of speculation in the City about the possibility of mergers between one or other of the big four, involving possibly Lloyds TSB and Barclays, National Westminster or Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. That could well happen, and we need to be assured that the pension arrangements contained in the Bill will be protected in any future change of ownership arrangements.

In the course that we now take, we are guided by those who have been negotiating on behalf of the action group. I welcome the opportunity to put on the record the interests of the action group and the wider concerns about where this financial amalgamation is leading.

8.16 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): This is proving to be a useful and interesting debate. I am reinforced in my conviction that I was right in the first place to join my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) in adding my name to the blocking motion, so that the matter could be aired and the issues arising from the merger could be considered in greater detail than the House is usually able to do.

I make it clear from the outset that it was never my intention to stand in the way of a commercial decision by the shareholders of the relevant institutions to join forces. I have a background in the City. Before I entered the House, I spent my last two and a half years in the City working for a merged bank, which was called Standard Chartered bank. I am aware that even today, there are those in the Standard Chartered bank who are the Standard bank people and those who are the Chartered bank people. I wish Lloyds TSB every success in merging, but I dare say that for a long time to come, there will be TSB people and Lloyds people.

It is not the role of the House to second-guess the commercial judgment about whether the shareholders were right to make that decision. However, it is right that we should have the opportunity of debating these issues. I was drawn to the debate because one of the leading lights in the TSB Hill Samuel action group, a chap called Billy James who was at Hill Samuel when I was at Standard Chartered, and who took me through the intricate business of interest swap deals, raised the issues with me.

I do not for a moment claim to be a pensions expert, but I understand something about the politics of the issue, which has caused concern throughout the House and among former employees of some of the constituent parts of the proposed merged group.

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

I do not think that the bank has addressed the politics of the move properly or effectively. Dismissing the action group as simply representing 200 people and questioning its motives are not favourable grounds for launching an assault on that group's case. In large measure, the action group comprises former senior executives of the bank. The former chairman of Hill Samuel bank, Sir Robert Clark, is chairman of the action group, and he is not a man to be dismissed lightly. I do not think that it is good politics to question the motives of people such as him. He and his colleagues have been anxious to draw to the attention of the House the difficulties experienced by poorer pensioners.

The politics seems fairly straightforward: a pension fund had almost £1,000 million in surplus and the employer declared a contributions holiday not for three, five or 10 years, but for nearly 20 years. That is a long time. I have been told that pensioners belonging to the pension fund of the world's most profitable bank—Lloyds bank—were claiming or were eligible for income support. That is something of an affront, and the problem should be addressed.

It is not sufficient for the bank to say, "We were constrained by rules that apply to other pension funds." The House cannot ignore that situation, and clause 8 addresses the question of pension funds. It is not sensible politics for poorer pensioners to claim income support when there are huge top-ups to the pension funds of former and existing directors. The Bill's sponsor, the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), has told us that £460 is being made available to poorer pensioners. I do not think that the politics of that decision is favourable.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central was correct in saying that the action group has sought to use the passage of the Bill through the House to draw attention to its concerns. It has made no secret of that fact: that is precisely what it is doing. It is unfortunate from the point of view of the bank, its employees and shareholders that, unlike other commercial amalgamations, the procedure is subject to the approval of this place. The hon. Gentleman explained very lucidly—I must confess that it was the first time I had heard it—exactly why the banks must do it this way. In a sense, that is bad luck for the bank concerned.

One of my constituents is a senior executive of the bank, and he appreciates the rationale underlying the merger. We do not wish to impair the effectiveness of our financial institutions or the City. They make a tremendous contribution to the British economy and we do not want them to be constrained. My constituent believes that it is unfair that pension anomalies or the problems of the pensions industry should be resolved on the back of this Bill. I understand his point of view, but we cannot ignore what is before us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs and I are grateful to the senior management of Lloyds TSB for sparing considerable time today—they spoke to my hon. Friend last week as well—attempting to address the concerns that we relayed on behalf of the action group. The management made several very fair points, not least of which is that this pension fund is only one of about 14. This pension fund is significant because it is in substantial surplus.

The only other fund in a comparable position is the Lloyds bank pension fund, which I believe is in surplus to the tune of £1.1 billion. However, that pension fund has more members than the TSB Hill Samuel fund. There is a pension holiday in that fund as well. Senior management pointed out that any treatment of anomalies or improvements in the lot of those on small pensions in the TSB Hill Samuel fund would, in equity, have to be dealt with across the range of other pensions in the enlarged group. I understand that argument.

As my hon. Friend said, we obtained certain undertakings today, for which we are grateful, and we received a letter from the bank, which has been referred to frequently this evening. Although that letter was sent to my hon. Friend and me—it is marked "strictly private and confidential"—I am glad that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central was able to read it into the record. I am sure that he was right to do so. We are invited to accept those undertakings in good faith, but I believe that they should also be given to Parliament, as the legislation is before the House. I invite the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central to agree with senior people at Lloyds TSB that the undertakings given to my hon. Friend and me should be made specifically to the House. That would be extremely helpful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned the key issues as far as we are concerned. We understand that the fund cannot be ring-fenced. I am grateful to Mike Fairey, the deputy chief executive of Lloyds TSB, for pointing out that the bank would not contemplate using the assets of one fund—particularly this one—to bolster another less healthy fund. We seek some assurance that the bank does not envisage having to seize part of that surplus in the foreseeable future to bolster a weaker pension fund. Such an assurance would go a long way towards meeting the concerns of the action group.

I am conscious of the fact that the fund is not the property of the members: it comprises contributions from the bank over the years. As we are invited to understand from the advertisements on Classic FM and elsewhere, investments can fall as well as rise. The fund is enjoying a substantial surplus at present, in part because of the state of the market.

However, it is worth reinforcing the point made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) that these pension funds represent the deferred incomes of employees. In exchange for accepting a lower salary when they joined the bank—many TSB employees were on low salaries compared with those offered by other banks—the deal was that they had jolly good pension arrangements. One could argue that those pension arrangements may have influenced people's decisions to join that institution.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) made the point that, although the scheme is not being transferred—it remains intact—the trustees will be appointed by the bank. Perhaps the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central can assist me on this point. Once the legislation is passed and the merger is completed, the bank will be able to nominate its people to serve on the board of trustees. Although they will not be in the majority, they will nevertheless enjoy parity with the chairman and other members who will constitute the board, as we discussed before lunch today.

The power of the new, merged bank to appoint its nominated trustees would clearly move from TSB Hill Samuel to the new bank of Lloyds TSB. If the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central can give us an undertaking that the bank will make clear its intentions vis-a-vis the fund to the House rather than to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs and me, that would be welcome.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central said that ex gratia payments were made to a number of low-paid pensioners. However, these payments were not hugely significant. I have some examples of inequalities, which were sent by Billy James to Lloyds TSB on Friday. The paper that I was waving earlier was in the hands of Lloyds TSB, and I quoted part of it this morning. If a former secretary aged 70 with about 15 years of service is receiving £102 a month, how does that sit with someone like Hugh Friedberg, who picks up £650,000 of enhancement to his pension? There must be some equity. The concern of some of us that there is not equity has brought us to question the passage of the Bill.

We are told that a pensioner with 29 years of service, now aged 83, is too proud to disclose her exact pension, but admits that it is well below the poverty line. The pension scheme representatives suggested that she should approach the bank's benevolent fund to pay for her hearing aid. Come off it! We are talking about the richest or most successful bank in the world, so we are told. Such issues must be seriously addressed because they represent poor politics.

I do not claim to understand all the intricacies of the Inland Revenue rules. However, I know that the National Association of Pension Funds has suggested that the rulebook, containing about 1,300 rules, should be burned and thrown away, and that life might be much better thereafter. The bank, in good faith, should deal with the anomalies that have arisen.

There has been discrimination against women. I understand that one of the corporate financiers transferred to Close Brothers—she was transferred from the Hill Samuel corporate finance department—discovered that a male colleague of equivalent rank and length of service was being offered a deferred pension entitlement about 30 per cent. more than that offered to her. Inquiries were made and the relevant actuary admitted that as on average the promotion prospects of women were less good than those of men, female executives were offered lower deferred pension entitlements than their male equivalents. That is not fair, and the issue should be addressed. I hope that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central will be able to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to the suggestion that he made to the bank today that it should appoint a deferred pensioner to sit with the trustees of the fund. The bank has said that it will consider that. I invite the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central to consult the bank and ask it whether it will give a clear-cut assurance that it will appoint such a pensioner, rather than saying that it will consider so doing. It would not be a great commitment to give; indeed, it is one that the bank should be able readily to give. I ask the hon. Gentleman whether he will so consult the bank.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs and I are relying quite substantially—I think that the House is looking to us to some extent because we are in possession of information which, I may add, I saw only at 6 pm, through no fault of the promoter, because I was otherwise engaged—on the good faith of the bank in terms of what it has undertaken to do. I think that the bank should agree to the appointment of an independent assessor. The pensions ombudsman will not be too keen to act as a court of appeal. It would be better if an independent actuary were appointed, with the agreement of both sides, so that he or she could take up anomalies and the position of lower-paid pensioners. If that were done, there would be a considerable improvement.

The House has raised some important questions, and it is important to understand that there is real concern outside the House. I think that the bank is now aware of that concern and is anxious to resolve problems. It has demonstrated its good faith to us. If it can give the assurances to the House that my hon. Friend and I have received from it, enhanced as I have suggested to the House, the Bill is likely to have a swift passage.

8.35 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a pleasure to be called after my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). I shall come on to what he said, with which I broadly agreed, in a moment. The blocking motion tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot and for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) is of considerable benefit to the House, in that it has provided us with the occasion for the debate.

I must declare a series of brief and fairly minor interests. About 30 years ago I was a consultant to Hill Samuel when it was an independent company. My wife is a shareholder in Lloyds TSB in a general personal equity plan, and I must say that it has done her very well. The corporate headquarters of Lloyds TSB is within my constituency. The bank has not sought to make any representations to me in a constituency capacity, other than those represented by the general vehicle of the statement issued on behalf of the promoters of the Bill, which was placed in the Vote Office. One of the senior Lloyds TSB executives, who is referred to in the Hill Samuel action group briefing, is one of my oldest friends. Finally, I am the chairman of the building societies' ombudsman council, which has not been without its passages of arms with the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society.

I came to the issue that is before the House, as have other hon. Members, including some of my hon. Friends, as a consequence of correspondence from constituents. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) referred to the action group as consisting of only 200 people; indeed, the promoters' statement does likewise. I know that no one intended to be derogatory by quoting that figure, but those constituents who wrote to me were, in their day, household names in corporate finance. It seemed significant that they were writing, as much as on behalf of anybody, on behalf of the 600 or 700 pensioners who were being looked after under the present TSB arrangements.

I acknowledge the benefits that flow from rationalisation in the financial sector. The present stock market is considerably influenced in an era of price stability by the gains that can be made from the proposed rationalisation. I believe that, until the recent price fall,

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

Lloyds TSB had the greatest market value of any bank in the world. I recognise the need for the Bill. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central spoke eloquently to its advantages and what would flow from it.

I recall that, in 1992, one of the factors that was thought to handicap Lloyds in making a bid for the Midland bank when the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation made its bid was that it would have to go through just such a Bill as the one that is before us, and would not be able to realise the benefits from the merger as quickly as the Hongkong and Shanghai would do from outside.

In addition to the impact on market behaviour, there will be an effect on customers in such circumstances, as the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said. I have previously quoted in the House C. S. Lewis's observation that, if one hears of someone doing good to others, one

"can always tell the others by their hunted expression."

When banks write to me about the benefits that will flow to me as their customer from a reorganisation of their affairs, I find that that is not always the case to the last iota, although I salute the TSB Foundation, which has done remarkable work and is a friend to hon. Members.

The pensions issue which has driven much of the debate comes back to old arguments about risk against reward. For a long time, commercial banking on either side of the Atlantic—I am looking back to before and after the war—was an industry in which people did not expect to be especially well rewarded, but were certain of a job for life. Market circumstances in the 1970s and early 1980s changed that. What was effectively an unspoken contract between employees and the banking industry—I am talking about the clearing banks—was inevitably disturbed and overturned. Ructions have subsequently flowed from that. Those observations apply obviously and particularly to TSB. Hill Samuel was in a different business where risks were greater but so were rewards, and there were pension differences, to which the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central referred.

Hon. Members have quoted material put out by the Hill Samuel action group about discrimination and fair treatment. The speed of events has created a gap in the briefing of the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central about what the action group has provided to Lloyds TSB in the past week. I do not hold that against him in any way, but there should be a sense of transparency and a perception that people are being fairly treated, especially in the climate of concern about pensions which the Government have clearly and directly reinforced.

Although it is alleged that the Bill has nothing to do with pensions, the sponsor of the Bill referred to pensions and clause 8 deals with retirement benefits schemes. There has been continuing activity and negotiation, but there was no reference to that in the statement that was put in the Vote Office. In the words of Sherlock Holmes, I am not left thinking, "These are deep waters, Watson," but they seem a little deeper than on first impression from the information that we were vouchsafed. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs says that there is a connection between the recent flurry of negotiations and the blocking motion, although the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central says that there is not.

I acknowledge the virtues of the Bill; given the current climate and perceptions, however, hon. Members would be failing in their scrutiny of such legislation if they took everything on trust. That applies as much to the network, to which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) referred, as to the pensioners. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central should deal with an issue to which my hon. Friends and other hon. Members have alluded. In the Hill Samuel Action Group briefing, there is a parenthesis in the section that refers to the pension scheme surplus, which states:

"Lloyds TSB appear to have told friendly current employees that the TSB Group Pension Scheme is already ring fenced, which it is not and which Lloyds TSB categorically refuse to do."

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot told us what the deputy chief executive said to him. It is not totally clear from that sentence in the briefing where truth lies. A specific contradiction of evidence is involved, so the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central would do the House a service if he dissected the sentence and said precisely where truth lies and why. We should find out what has been said to give that contrary impression.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs for his diligence in dealing with Lloyds TSB. As he said, we can return to the matter on Third Reading. I hope that, by then, Lloyds TSB will have concluded its consideration of whether to have a pensioner trustee, so that we shall know one way or another.

8.44 pm

Mr. Illsley: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall address the concerns that have been raised: we have had a frank and open exchange of views; whether it has been generated by the blocking motion remains to be seen.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) was gracious in his comments about the meetings, and referred to issues in the letter, which should be taken at face value and in the spirit in which it was offered. I am sure that Lloyds TSB will honour assurances given in it.

I take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) that the letter was marked "strictly private and confidential". I have referred to it at length and apologise for that, but those references have contributed to the debate. I am sure that the assurances given by Lloyds TSB to hon. Members will count and that it will stand by them.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) that private Bills can be an obscure method of achieving an outcome, and could be described as a contrivance. Perhaps the procedure will be improved in the fulness of time. I also agree that the issues are not trivial and that interesting matters have been raised. I take on board what he said about employment issues. As a Member of Parliament, I have always defended employment and jobs, and would not have agreed to sponsor the Bill had I not been reassured on closures and jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central mentioned the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society, which was given five years' autonomy and independence at the time of the acquisition. It is now part of Lloyds, but I have been assured that there is no plan to change its status as a consequence of the merger or of any other issue. As far as I am aware, it will remain

independent. I undertake to give my hon. Friend any information that is available from Lloyds TSB about the post office initiative.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) questioned the benefits to customers. I listed some of them earlier, and will not bore hon. Members by repeating them. His remarks about internet banking in his constituency reinforces my point about footfall in branches: people with access to the internet and direct banking prefer that system to going to branches. He also referred to a further acquisition, but in view of the problems that I have had getting the Bill through the House, I hope that it is a long way down the line.

I agree with the hon. Member for Aldershot that this is a good opportunity to debate the issues. Without wishing to be derogatory to any of its members, I said that the Hill Samuel action group had only 200 members and mentioned in the same breath the number of shareholders, customers and people who want the House to approve the de facto merger.

The hon. Member for Aldershot also graciously referred to meetings with Lloyds over the past few days, and asked for further undertakings about the deferred pensioner trustee. I cannot go further than the letter that has been sent to him, but Lloyds will have taken his remarks on board. I shall ask Lloyds TSB to consider whether the assurance can be reinforced and made more concrete. However, I am sure that Lloyds will genuinely and sincerely consider what has been said in the debate. It will study the speeches closely and try to deal with those as far as it can.

I take on board what the hon. Gentleman has said about differences in pensions, particularly in relation to male and female employees. I have always supported equal opportunities and, if what he says is true, obviously that is a cause for concern. Again, I am sure that Lloyds TSB will address that in future meetings, either with Conservative Members or with the action group.

The hon. Gentleman asked for a clear-cut assurance on an independent assessor. Again, I will put that to the bank. It has taken on board what has been said. If it can go further than what is in the letter about an independent assessor and pensions ombudsman, I am sure that it will wish to accommodate the action group's wishes and those of Conservative Members.

I take on board what the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) said about the membership of the Hill Samuel action group, but I still think that that has to be weighed against the number of customers and shareholders who have voted for the merger to go ahead. I thank him for his comments regarding the TSB Foundation, of which he is obviously aware in view of his constituency interest.

I take on board what the right hon. Gentleman said about the decreasing levels of pensions, the steps by the present Government to deal with that and the pension reviews that are taking place. On the assurance about ring fencing, which appears in the Hill Samuel action group briefing material, I can only refer the right hon. Gentleman to what was said at the meeting with his two colleagues and the deputy chief executive. I am sure that the deputy chief executive will stand by that and by what was said as recently as this lunchtime.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed.

Agriculture (West Dorset)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

8.51 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I read in the summary agenda that is now helpfully provided that we have until 10.30 for this debate, but I hasten to reassure both you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Minister who kindly attends that I have no intention of dragging out my remarks for any such period.

Just before the recess, perhaps somewhat mischievously, I asked a question—at what should have been Prime Minister's Question Time, but turned out to be questions to the Deputy Prime Minister due to the absence of the Prime Minister on more important business—about whether there was a place for dairy farming in particular in the Prime Minister's vision of cool Britannia. I was reassured to hear the Deputy Prime Minister tell us that, in the view of Ministers', there was a place for dairy farming.

I asked that question partly because of my experiences in West Dorset of the current state of farming and of allied industries, and partly because of the evidence, which I think is mounting, of the attitude of Ministers in the relevant Department to that state of affairs, and their vision of how it might evolve. It is those two points that I want to deal with this evening.

The first of those concerns—the concern about the actual state of farming and of allied industries in West Dorset—is born in on me, as I am sure it is on many of my hon. Friends and many Labour Members, almost daily by correspondence, meetings and visits to farms. As the Minister will be aware, West Dorset is a constituency that happens to contain an economy that, apart from some high-tech activity and tourism, depends almost entirely on the welter of services that administer to farming, and on farming itself. Therefore, for anyone representing such a constituency, what is going on in farming in such a place is of urgent concern.

The pattern revealed in the dry statistics, where we are frequently reminded that farm incomes have dropped by between 30 and 40 per cent., is not the pattern in West Dorset, where it is far more exaggerated. I hope that, without unduly trying the Minister's patience, I can do something that I fear, from my experience in Whitehall and perhaps from his experience as a Minister, too seldom happens: to try to bring home to him and to his Department issues that come to a constituency Member directly, but that often for a Minister are filtered through layers of charming and intelligent bureaucrats, to the point where perhaps some of the poignancy is evened out.

I quote just a few of what are in fact several hundred such letters from West Dorset farmers and people in industries connected with farming there. A well-known farmer writes:

"We . . . rear first class, quality beef, pork and lamb and we can assure you that the fluctuations in the livestock market over the last year have crippled our business. Over the last twenty years our situation has never been more difficult."

Another equally well-known farmer writes:

"We are established farmers"—

we are talking here of a substantial farm—

"working hard against the odds to avoid going out of our profession and becoming a drag on the public purse."

We are talking here not of a diminution of income, but of making losses and going out of business.

A third farmer writes:

"My own farm income"—

this is a smaller farm—

"is so reduced that after all the long hours worked by myself and my family—"

I am sure that the Minister will not want to deny that farmers are a hard-working breed—

"at the end of the day our business is running at a loss.

How long can we carry on like this?"

However, it is by no means true that such letters come only from farmers. I have one from a concern that perhaps even in the Minister's view and certainly in that of the Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister, might have nothing to do with farming: structural engineers, steel stockholders and building contractors in my constituency. It says:

"I also remind you of the problems in the rural areas of the traders and people who run businesses and employ people serving agriculture. Farmers are the first to reinvest in the economy when they have the opportunity but clam up when things go against them. This results in terrible hardship for support industries."

Nowhere is the case more poignant than in relation to dairy farms in my constituency. One writes to me:

"the milk price has dropped.

That has resulted in a fall of income of £85,000 in our business.

Currently our milk is trading at 5 p a litre less than 12 Months ago and we certainly expect 1998 . . . will be dramatically worse."

Another dairy farmer writes to me:

"If things do not improve in the foreseeable future, I may possibly have to move to Greece . . . This would not be an easy decision to make as my family have been farming in Dorset for at least 3 generations."

Therefore, a group of small and medium farmers and people who work in industries supporting farming, who are well-established, hard-working people, operating fairly efficient businesses—often very efficient businesses—face not a drop of a third or so in their incomes, but, perhaps because they have borrowed from the banks, leased quota or some combination, or because they have a debt burden stretching back some years, which they are now unable to finance, the likelihood of going out of business in the near future. The problem extends not just to them but to large farms.

One farm in my constituency comprises more than 900 acres, and has a dairy herd and considerable cereal crops. Its owners have presented me not only with anecdotes but with accounts, as have many other farmers. They are experiencing a drop in income not of 30 per cent. but of 80 per cent. for 1997 compared with 1996. As the Minister will realise, that is for a year which by no means reflects the full effects of the pound on farming in general. In 1998, we can expect that the 900-acre farm, which is perhaps one of the larger and more efficient general farms in the United Kingdom, will be making a loss.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): My hon. Friend and I both represent Dorset, and many of the businesses to which he referred cover both our constituencies. Like him, I have received many letters, and I should like to

read briefly from a piece written by a firm of chartered surveyors which has offices in both our constituencies. It states:

"There is a sense of impending agricultural recession and gloom. Farmers by nature have for many years complained about prices and the weather and to some extent I feel have "cried wolf" but now the wolf has arrived . . . farmers accounts which in many cases end on 31 March will show a significant difference for this year compared to last. For instance I have seen accounts from a 240 acre farm which is farmed by three brothers and their wives; last year they made a profit of £60,000, this year they expect half this . . . this is only £10,000 a family which is very little return compared with all the work put in and the capital employed."

I hope that that helps my hon. Friend, and makes it clear that the problem he is outlining is common throughout the county of Dorset.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I do not want the debate to spill beyond the borders of West Dorset.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he makes clear a situation that is poignantly felt in West Dorset. I shall not try the patience of the House, but I could echo many times over the sentiments that he describes. I have presented only a small selection of the several hundred letters that I have received.

I referred to the attitude of Ministers. I in no way accuse Ministers of bad faith or irrationality, but I do not think that I am speculating or being unfair in what I am about to say, because the evidence is mounting that they have adopted a clear and ostensibly rational position which is remarkable, and quite contrary to that adopted over the past 50 to 100 years by Ministers concerned with agriculture. The evidence comes not only from their public statements but from what they have said in private when visiting my constituency, and from what they have said to the National Farmers Union when discussing such matters with it.

It is clear that Ministers believe that farming, and, I suppose it has to be said, all the allied trades, have to be seen in much the same light in which Baroness Thatcher once saw the coal mines. At least, that is how we see it in West Dorset.

Ministers appear to believe that farms in constituencies such as mine—farms ranging from perhaps 50 to 1,000 or 2,000 acres—are intrinsically uneconomic. They believe that such farms have been propped up by years of unfair subsidy, and that, in a new wave of Blairite Thatcherism, they should be driven out of business by a harsh but entirely scrupulous and detailed attention to economic reality. I think that Ministers feel that farmers need to be made to face that harsh cold reality, just as Baroness Thatcher felt that it was necessary to make the miners face reality when she removed the subsidies that propped up their pits.

It is not ignoble for Ministers to wish to create circumstances in which businesses—farms are certainly businesses—have to face economic reality. I suppose that I have spent the whole of my so far paltry political life supporting that general view, but I fear that an error is now being made. Perhaps it stems from the fact that Ministers have not attended closely enough to the origins of the theory that they so devoutly espouse.

When Baroness Thatcher and others attacked the subsidies that propped up uneconomic industries, they did so precisely because they believed that those industries were intrinsically uneconomic. Therein lies the vast gulf between the coal mines and farming. I cannot speak for all of them, but the vast majority of the farms in West Dorset are not intrinsically uneconomic. They can compete on a level playing field and in an open market, and, to my considerable surprise, I find that they are willing to do so.

When I was first chosen as a candidate in West Dorset, and when I was subsequently elected, I thought that I would face a near lynch mob when I addressed farmers and I espoused free market principles. I found the very opposite—farmers in West Dorset are quite content to face a genuine open market on a genuine level playing field. However, there is not a level playing field; there is not an open market.

On the contrary, the Agriculture Minister constantly tells us that it is part of his agenda to undo the common agricultural policy. Therefore, Ministers must have fully realised that there is such a thing as the CAP. What is it? It is a massive array of props and subsidies, in the main for farmers on the continent, who are much smaller and less efficient. They are being kept in business by that array of subsidies. It is against those farmers—not wholly, but predominantly—that the farmers of West Dorset must compete. There is no open market or level playing field; there is a multifarious and hugely complex system of changing subsidy.

In fact, the situation is worse than that. My farmers have to face other obstacles, quite apart from the subsidies enjoyed by farmers against whom they are competing—they have to face particularly intense environmental, health and safety, and animal welfare legislation. If it would not try the patience of the House, I could read out letter after letter on those issues. My farmers daily find, when they compare their lives and working habits with those of their competitors, that they are constantly at a disadvantage.

I shall cite just one example, but it is a striking one. When the whole vexed issue of beef on the bone arose, the Minister of State and the Minister of Agriculture had the opportunity to insist that beef could be imported only if it satisfied the ultimate test that would have ensured that it could not have infected ganglia, if we are to believe the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee report. The Minister could have insisted that only beef under 30 months old could be imported, because the SEAC report makes it perfectly clear that only beef over 30 months old has shown any trace of infected ganglia.

Had the Minister done that, he would have had to ban all imports from all countries that have had the slightest trace of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, other than the United Kingdom, because no other country where there has been BSE has instituted an over-30-months scheme. The Minister chose not to do that, and so failed to remedy one of the aspects that we can describe only as a non-level playing field.

The over-30-months scheme happens to have attached to it the subsidies that make it tolerable for my farmers, but there are many other cases of schemes, rules or laws being introduced—sometimes European directives being enforced too vigorously by our officials—that make it extraordinarily difficult for our farmers to compete on a fair basis against, for example, Italian farmers, who benefit from a somewhat more lax—some may say more realistic or less rigorously proper—application of European directives.

[Mr. Letwin]

The burden of my argument is that West Dorset farmers are not in the position suggested by dry statistics. They are not suffering a one-third drop in income—in many cases they are suffering drops of 70 to 80 per cent.—

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I heartily congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I, too, represent a farming constituency, and the problems are the same in Shropshire as they are in Dorset.

Is it not incredibly frustrating for dairy and beef farmers that world demand for their products is increasing in a straight line? Indeed, world demand for dairy products is increasing annually at a rate of 10 to 15 per. cent. Because of the astonishing improvement in the nutritional demands of the huge Chinese population, demand for beef is growing. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is making sceptical gestures. He is ignoring the reality that, given a free market and an unshackling of the appalling burdens placed upon them, farmers in Shropshire and Dorset could prosper and take advantage of an expanding world market for their products.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as that is exactly the burden of the second part of my argument. My farmers could prosper in an open market, but they do not face an open market—it is a rigged market in many different respects. It is partly rigged by things beyond Ministers' immediate control, such as the CAP and the failures of the World Trade Organisation, and partly by things which are, to a degree, within Ministers' control—our regulations.

Together, those matters mean that the farmers of west Dorset—and hence the chain of suppliers that depend upon them—are not the intrinsically uneconomic coal miners whom the noble Lady Thatcher wished to deprive of their subsidies. They are a different breed. They have been reduced to their present state by Government and intergovernmental action. It therefore behoves the Government to take action to remedy the problem.

Within the CAP are the means to remedy, in part, the particular deficiencies from which my farmers suffer. For example, there is agrimonetary compensation. I hate the CAP in all its devices. I hate nothing more than the device of the green pound, which I associate—emotionally and partly intellectually—with single currencies and other abhorrent devices. However, the green pound had the one great advantage of having associated with it agrimonetary compensation. That was an effort to ensure that, in this "Alice in Wonderland" world of subsidies—and hence intrinsically unlevel playing fields—the playing field could be relevelled by adjusting for exchange rate differentials.

I do not suppose for a moment that Ministers wish to continue with the CAP, and nor do I. However, neither they nor I can do anything about the fact that the farmers of West Dorset must live with the CAP. Ministers can and ought to play the game by the crazy rules which have been set. It is only if one plays by all the rules that some of the craziness is removed. Ministers ought to be applying for full agrimonetary compensation, but they are not doing so. The Minister of Agriculture has said that he has applied for a small amount of compensation, but it is not enough.

Ministers could try not to impose any further regulatory burdens on my farmers—which stretch back, inevitably, to the supply industries which serve them—which are not suffered by their competitors at this time of the high pound and the failure of agrimonetary compensation. My farmers regard with dismay the proposition that fertiliser or pesticide levies might be imposed. They see all these moves as an effort not to deal fairly with them and not to try to put them in a position where they could compete, but to try to pretend that they can absorb an infinite amount of regulation when their competitors have far less, and to pretend that they can absorb a situation in which "Alice in Wonderland" subsidies prop up their competitors but corresponding subsidies are not provided for them.

That situation will not last. The Minister of State and his right hon. Friend may believe that farmers are, by and large, rich people with large cars or Range Rovers, who have a wealth of capital to fall back on. They may believe, genuinely, that, in the end, they can squeeze the oranges until the pips squeak, and it will all be all right with a bit more efficiency. In West Dorset, it will not be all right, because of three factors: small farmers will quickly go out of business; the supply industries will disappear permanently from west Dorset; and middle and large-sized farmers will be consolidated into great going concerns.

Over time, the face of West Dorset, and its society, will crumble. That inheritance is terribly precious—not just to farmers and suppliers in my constituency, but to people throughout the country. West Dorset is a special kind of society, which works in social terms. People know and support one another. Children grow up in such a way that they become decent people. As they are growing up, people around them look after them in a way that is seldom seen in our cities and is difficult to replicate except in a deeply rural society.

That is a model which the Ministry does ill to attack, and which the country should support. That is why, without the slightest trace of shame or any sense of special pleading, I argue that the Minister should reconsider the Government's attitudes and policies, which will drive the society in places such as West Dorset out of existence, never to be recreated.

9.14 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on securing this debate, and on being fortunate enough to have more time than perhaps he envisaged—I welcome that. I shall not operate Parkinson's law and expand my comments to fill the time available, but I shall try to answer his points. He has raised these matters with the Deputy Prime Minister, and was active at Agriculture questions on 19 March, although the answer that he was given about extra Government compensation was not as he described it.

I make it absolutely clear that, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman suggested, the Government do not have the slightest intention of doing to farming what the previous Government did to coal mining. Indeed, the analogy somewhat diminishes his case, especially as he was a special adviser in the Prime Minister's policy unit between 1983 and 1986—at the time of the year-long

strike—actively seeking to close down the coal mining industry. The Government make no analogy between the two industries, and he does himself a disservice in suggesting that we do.

The hon. Gentleman represents a beautiful part of the country. Indeed, I was almost there today—I found myself in Hampshire, on campaigning, rather than ministerial, duties. However, Dorset is different from the surrounding counties in respect of the dairy herd. It has a high proportion of dairy herds, which account for some 20 per cent. of the dairy cattle in the county—it is second only to Cheshire in that respect—so it is a very important part of the dairy industry, and we pay tribute to the work that goes on there. There are 90,000 dairy cows in Dorset, which is 5 per cent. of the total in England. The dairy industry there makes a substantial contribution to the economy.

Obviously, farms come into and go out of business. For the avoidance of doubt, I should point out that, between the middle of 1996 and the middle of 1997, 20 farms in Dorset ceased milk production, which is in line with what we would expect in terms of the national average. Because of pressures on the industry, that trend is likely to continue.

We are well aware, and we do not shy from the fact at the Dispatch Box—we say the same things privately—that there has been a fall in farm incomes. Agriculture is going through a very difficult time, and the past year has been a bad one for farm incomes generally and for the livestock sector in particular.

The income from farming is estimated to have fallen by 37 per cent. in real terms in 1997. I accept that average figures are always misleading—some sectors fare better than others—but there has been a fall across all sectors. On average, the fall in income in the dairy sector has been 36 per cent. in one year, and some of those engaged in lowland cattle or sheep farming have faced a drop in income of 63 per cent. in one year. Those figures are in real terms, and I accept that they are substantial.

The principal cause of the across-the-board fall in farm incomes has been the lower prices attracted by all commodities, particularly the major commodities. The relative strength of sterling over the past year has had a major effect on the prices attainable in the United Kingdom—we do not seek to deny that. Unfortunately, while sterling remains high and while there are structural surpluses in most agricultural sectors in the European Union, the prospects for increased commodity prices and improved incomes in the short term are not good.

We have spoken in the House and outside about commentators who have predicted that in 1999 there should be an upturn in farm prices and incomes on the back of a weakening in sterling and more buoyant world markets. Those are the forecasts for 1999 by independent commentators and some banks. The current situation is expected to be temporary.

Mr. Letwin: Will the Minister confirm that those expectations are not shared by the Chancellor?

Mr. Rooker: It is expected that the situation in agriculture will be temporary. For the past year, farm incomes have been bad, and expectations are not good for this year. As I have said, independent commentators have looked at the figures, and have forecast a different situation in 1999.

I accept that there are difficulties in all sectors of agriculture, but we expect them to be temporary. In the five years from 1990 to 1995, farm incomes and agricultural prices were looking up. They were five good years, but I do not use that as an excuse for saying that one has to take the rough with the smooth. However, to take one year in a large industry and react to it as if it reflected the long-term future is not sensible in economic terms, and it would not be good Government conduct.

I accept that farm incomes this year are bad, and I shall deal with the serious consequences of that fall, which, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, affects not just farmers.

Since we came to government, we have discovered that myths are perpetuated in parliamentary and departmental questions. It is not generally appreciated that, after the 20 March 1996 statement about BSE and new variant CJD, the previous Government laid a statutory instrument on, I think, 16 or 19 April—I cannot remember the exact date—banning the import of beef from animals aged over 30 months from wherever they came. The idea that there is not some sort of level playing field for imports is incorrect, because the previous Government legislated for that.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee advice, which I shall not go into in great detail because it has been done before, was to de-bone meat from animals of more than 30 months. The previous Government went beyond that, on a precautionary principle, and said that 30 months would be the limit for all beef. They took powers to stop the import of beef from animals that were over 30 months. Therefore, whatever the hon. Gentleman has been told, it is not right to say that vast imports of beef are not subject to the over-30-months rule. Different countries have different rules, and about a dozen countries are BSE-free.

The Government took unilateral action on 1 January on specified risk materials, which requires that point-of-sale imported beef should comply with the same rules as home-grown beef. There is a requirement on the producer and the seller to make sure that that is the case. In that respect, there is not unfair competition, but, of course, we suffer from the inability to export our products. We have laboured consistently on that, and hope fairly soon to start exporting from Northern Ireland.

I shall now deal with the impact of falling farm incomes.

There is no question that there has been a dramatic fall in farm incomes in West Dorset. Detailed figures on a constituency basis are not available, but I fully accept that the hon. Gentleman has reported to the House the footprints or fingerprints of his constituents, and I understand what they say about their individual circumstances. Government cannot collect information in a detailed fashion, but we know that a dramatic fall in incomes in West Dorset occurred simply because of its dependence on dairy production.

We must keep a sense of perspective in looking at the damage to the industry as a whole. There were five good years, when sterling was relatively weak and commodity prices were firm. The hon. Gentleman talked about farmers' debt, but in fact 45 per cent. of all farm businesses carry no debt whatever, although that is not an

[Mr. Rooker]

excuse to create more debt. We expect the present circumstances to be temporary. Debt will rise in the farming industry, but it is not massive.

Mr. Letwin: I am doubly grateful to the Minister for giving way again. Does he accept that those figures can be misleading? In my constituency, many farmers are severely burdened with off-balance-sheet debt in the form of leased quota, which can be just as important to a dairy farmer as debt on the balance sheet.

Mr. Rooker: I fully accept that. Some farmers will be badly hit by extra investment or debt that they did not expect, because they did not foresee the ban, the drop in commodity prices or the strength of sterling. I freely accept that debt will vary enormously: I have simply given an overall figure, and draw no general point from it.

The effect of last year's fall in farm incomes may not be so dramatic in the long term. There is good reason to believe that most farmers—I will not argue about semantics: by most, I mean the majority, or more than half—will be able to ride out this difficult period. We are not being complacent, but we must take a rational, long-term view of the industry's prospects.

I take on board what the hon. Gentleman said about allied industries. To my astonishment, I was the first Minister ever to visit the only British plough producer, in Warwickshire. It is a real success: a family business less than 30 years old that exports ploughs to Japan. It survives on exports, and is obviously desperate for more, simply because it can foresee a decline in home orders because of the drop in farm incomes; when those go down, farmers naturally order less capital equipment.

There is a knock-on effect on allied industries, some of which are wholly involved in agricultural production, while others have a wider spread of customers, so it is not always easy to track exactly what happens. I know from my time in manufacturing industry that there is a downturn when one's customers are suffering because of particular problems in their own industry. I accept that point fully.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned agrimonetary compensation, which is a bit of a mouthful.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rooker: No. I want to make the point about agrimonetary compensation. I have answered enough questions from North Shropshire, and I want to stick to West Dorset for the moment.

I know that there is a desire for us to pay more of the compensation that is available under the schemes, but the money is not free. More than most Conservative Members, the hon. Member for West Dorset knows that it is not free money. My right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Minister of Agriculture do not simply have to pick up the phone and ask for the money: there is a massive contribution from the British taxpayer. It is worth repeating that it is not free money, there for the taking at no cost to the taxpayer.

I am not going down the byways with this. Everyone knows of the public expenditure limits and constraints that we freely entered into in our contract with the electorate. That contract is what we are sticking to, and there is a downside to restricting public expenditure, in terms of collateral damage.

I understand the concern among farmers about the possibility of further green rate revaluation, but we have to look at the wider picture. The agrimonetary compensation system has provided protection for the United Kingdom farmer against the consequences of the strength of sterling. It is difficult to say that the money is in pocket, but the freeze in green rates for direct payments has benefited farmers by about £400 million in the past two years, and that is not always fully appreciated.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the package of measures that my right hon. Friend the Minister announced initially in December, and reaffirmed, slightly adjusted, in February. The grand total of £85 million was the same, most of which went to the beef sector with a minority to sheep.

The livestock industry faces exceptional circumstances and we had to go to the European Commission to get approval for our proposal. Most of the payments have now been made. We intended to get them all paid by Easter, and I regret that we have not fully complied, but most of the cheques were in the post to farmers early in March. However, that package was exceptional, and must be seen against a tight background on public expenditure. We will keep the situation under review. We have promised to do so, and will do it at each step in the process.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the milk price and the difficulties that his dairy farmers have suffered as a result. The Government do not control the price of milk. He, more than most Conservative Members, must know that the dismantling of the milk marketing boards and going for market prices for milk has had consequences. One is that Ministers do not fix farm prices.

I understand that many farmers rightly look at the prices of goods in supermarkets. Raw materials make up a smaller proportion of our food prices than they used to because of the massive amount of food processing and we have to consider the problem in the round. We have to take account of the fact that supermarket prices are largely determined by competitive pressures, which in the main are good, as competition brings greater efficiency and lower prices to consumers.

I accept that there can be a downside for the original producers, but we live in a market economy, constrained, of course, by our membership of the European Union and by the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Letwin: The Minister has been extremely patient, and I am grateful to him for giving way again. I cannot resist asking him whether, in the light of his remarks, he will take special care to join those of us who have been urging the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its current inquiry into the milk market to consider not merely the wholesale but the retail part of the market. There is an abundance of evidence to show that margins have not responded in the way that competitive pressure should have suggested, and that in fact supermarkets have been taking an increased margin at the expense of farmers.

Mr. Rooker: It would be unwise of me to give a detailed response off the top of my head. I think that the Minister of Agriculture has sent a note to the inquiry, although I could stand corrected, and if I am wrong I will

write to the hon. Gentleman. I should not comment on the details of the MMC inquiry. I see that the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) wants to intervene; I will give way to him, as he also represents Dorset.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I thank the Minister for giving way. Does he agree that the value of sterling and world prices expressed in sterling have a far greater effect on prices than competition in the domestic market—whether in milk or other products—the effects of supermarkets or the milk regime? It is the value of sterling that has had the significant effect.

Mr. Rooker: No, the value of sterling has an impact, but it is not the sole impact. From where the hon. Gentleman sits, it might look easy to target the one area that he thinks the Government might be responsible for. It is not like that. The value of sterling does not stand alone: other factors are at work, on which I touched earlier.

I want also to touch on aspects of reform of the common agricultural policy, to which the hon. Member for West Dorset rightly referred. A central plank one of our key manifesto commitments is to seek reform of the CAP. We cannot demand or impose such reform; we can get it only by consent. The Agenda 2000 document was tabled by the Commission. It is the only game in town, and it is the one we have to run with. That is what my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture is seeking to do. It does not go far enough for us, particularly on milk quotas.

We oppose milk quotas, and find extending them to 2006 unacceptable. We want them abolished. They stand directly in the way of the British dairy industry competing in world markets with world-quality first-class products that would sweep the board in many countries if only we could get into them. We have said that repeatedly. That is why we are pressing for reform and the abolition of quotas. We cannot impose it unilaterally, given our membership of the European Union. We have made clear the ends to which we are working. We fully understand that the quota system stands in the way of our quality dairy industry making the best of its business.

We need substantial reform of the CAP, to move it away from production-related support mechanisms. We have to get to a more market-oriented policy for agricultural products. We have no fear of that. We could then redirect much CAP money—not all of it, and we do not have a figure or anywhere near one at the moment—to the rural environment and agri-environment measures.

I was a bit upset that the hon. Member for West Dorset said that his farmers were upset about animal welfare legislation, and thought that it stood in their way. I am unaware of complaints from farmers that animal welfare legislation approved by this House stands in the way of their running their businesses properly.

We are not prepared to bend the rules on animal welfare. I am not au fait with the point that the hon. Member was making, because he did not give a specific example, but read out a list of barriers, one of which was health and safety. During a recent spot check in one county—not West Dorset—on 4,000 farms by the Health and Safety Executive, 40 tractors were seized and taken off the land because they were unsafe. There will be no diminution of health and safety rules. The farming industry is highly dangerous in some ways. We have no policies for cutting animal welfare legislation. I am not au fait with his point. If he has a particular point, perhaps he will write to me.

The Government have left no one in any doubt that one of our main priorities is reform of the CAP. That is not to say that, within the CAP, we are powerless to do anything. We have shown that by our announcement of the £85 million—extra money that did not come lightly and had a consequence for the British taxpayer—and by our other measures announced a few weeks ago in respect of the Government picking up the tab for the full start-up costs of the cattle tracing system and the first year's costs as well. That is an important measure. The system will benefit the cattle industry. We will have it up and running—going live—this summer. That will greatly benefit the industry.

We have taken on board some of the costs of the specified risk material controls in the abattoirs. We understood the pressures that were piling up on the industry. They were put there not by this Government but by lower commodity prices, the strength of sterling and other factors. Where we could take action, such as with the £85 million and imposing lower costs on the industry, we did. I do not expect a lot of thanks for that, but it is the reality.

We recognise the concern of farmers about the pressure on their industry. I and my colleagues in the Ministry meet farmers regularly, as well as food producers and food consumers. We are working to ensure a long-term future for the UK farming sector.

We are not seeking to put farming out of business—far from it. We want it to be viable. If we came along today or next month with a cheque for whatever amount, that would stop a problem for a week, a month or a quarter, but it would do nothing at all to improve the industry's long-term prospects. We are determined to make sure that we have a long-term viable agriculture.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 April 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Inequalities

1. **Mr. David Marshall** (Glasgow, Shettleston): What discussions he has had with Greater Glasgow health board on the Green Paper, "Working Together for a Healthier Scotland", in respect of inequalities in health in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37613]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Sam Galbraith): On 9 March, I met representatives of Greater Glasgow health board to discuss the Green Paper and its approach to reducing inequalities. I also visited a number of projects that are currently under way to tackle health inequalities in disadvantaged communities in Glasgow.

Mr. Marshall: Has the Minister studied the recent report by Bristol university, which stated that seven of the 10 constituencies with the poorest health statistics in the United Kingdom were in Glasgow? Is that not a shocking legacy of 18 years of Tory government? Does the Minister agree that poor health is related to poverty, unemployment, housing and education? Therefore, will he review the share formula and allocate additional resources to Glasgow that are based not upon population criteria but upon health needs?

Mr. Galbraith: Yes, I have read the Bristol report, which highlights what we have known for some time—that there are huge health inequalities in Scotland. Our method of tackling those is not to blame individuals or to nanny or nag them. Our policy is to get at the root problems and deal with life circumstances—education, jobs, health care and housing, and we have put in an additional £900 million to deal with those. The Government put their money where their mouth is. We are reviewing the share formula. It is based partly on population and partly on deprivation, but the issue is whether deprivation, which is reflected through the standardised mortality rates, is properly indexed. We expect a result on that later in the year.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): When my hon. Friend met the Greater Glasgow health board, did he discuss the section of the Green Paper relating to fluoride in the public water supply? If he did, did the board agree with him, and with me, that that is the best way to solve some of Scotland's dental health problems?

Mr. Galbraith: There is no question but that one of the main markers of inequalities in health relating to deprivation is the poor state of oral health in deprived communities. There are three ways to tackle that. One is by reducing sugar intake and another is regular brushing of the teeth, but unquestionably the best, and overwhelmingly most effective, way is to put fluoride in the water, and that is supported by all health boards and by me.

Criminal Justice System

2. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham** (Perth): What recent discussions he has had concerning the criminal justice system in Scotland. [37614]

6. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement about current trends with respect to criminal convictions in Scotland. [37618]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): In addition to periodic meetings of the criminal justice forum, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]* Accurate reading is sometimes a mistake. I and my hon. Friends have frequent contacts with the various agencies and organisations involved in the criminal justice system.

Detailed information about criminal proceedings in Scottish courts, including convictions, was published in March 1998 in a Scottish Office statistical bulletin. A copy is, of course, in the Library.

Ms Cunningham: Is not confidence in the police absolutely essential for an effective criminal justice system? There is clearly a huge issue in Scotland at the moment, in that confidence in the Grampian police force has been much dented. I think that there is cross-party agreement that the current chief constable of Grampian should go. The Secretary of State did not institute procedures yesterday to sack him. If the news from Aberdeen today is unsatisfactory, will he do that today and will he say whether he has plans to introduce more effective public accountability of the police in Scotland?

Mr. Dewar: As the House almost certainly knows, earlier today the Grampian police board passed a unanimous vote of no confidence in its chief constable. I have not yet had it confirmed, but I understand that, despite that, he has not stated an intention to resign. No one can take satisfaction from what is a sad and unfortunate story, but, in the light of the considered and damaging reports from a senior independent officer and the chief inspector of constabulary, I believe that the board's vote was fully justified. I have not heard formally from the board, but, in those circumstances, statutory powers are available to it if it feels that those are necessary.

Like all those who serve the public, the police must earn the public's confidence. The board clearly believes that the Grampian police need a new start and a new start

means a new chief constable. It is time to rebuild trust between the police and the people, to harness the skills and energy of the many able and dedicated officers in the Grampian force and to turn to the task of making the necessary reforms. I am ready to help in any way that I can and I have no doubt that I shall be hearing from the police board shortly.

Mr. Swayne: With the greatest of respect, I do not believe that, by any stretch of the imagination, the Secretary of State's statement answered Question 6 on the Order Paper. Will he therefore kindly answer it and, in so doing, say why, when Scottish chief constables asked for £28 million, he gave them only half of that for a standstill budget?

Mr. Dewar: That was a question full of character, but little sense. If the hon. Gentleman looks, he will find that, this year, there was an increase in spending for chief constables. He will also know that recorded crime in Scotland was at the lowest level since 1981. I hope that he will congratulate the police on that fact.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Given the difficulties that delay can cause when, as has been referred to, the Government, the police board and the public totally and deservedly lose confidence in a senior police officer, could we review the procedures, so that a situation such as Grampian can never happen again?

Mr. Dewar: This is a most unusual, exceptional and distressing set of circumstances. It is important that we have balance and that the police's independence is protected. That is done in the Police (Scotland) Act 1967, but, as I have said, in the light of the police board's unanimous decision today, procedures are open to the board to resolve the problem. I do not want to anticipate a request to me, but I am ready to help in any way that I can. My one wish is not to exacerbate the position, but to see confidence restored and a future built on the energy and ability of the many excellent police officers in the Grampian force.

There clearly have been shortcomings, as particularly the chief inspector of constabulary's report and Mr. Power's investigation into the Scott Simpson case underline. We must learn those lessons quickly. It is important that we get a new chief constable in post as soon as possible.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I endorse what the Secretary of State has said about a new start and the need to start immediately on restoring public confidence in Grampian police—and, indeed, on restoring morale within the service—but will he turn his mind to another event that happened earlier today: the decision of the sheriff in the borders to throw out the case against Mr. Jim Sutherland in relation to the regulations on beef on the bone, and his description of a part of the regulations as "defective"? Does that not prove what my colleagues and I said when we tabled the prayer against the regulations earlier this year—that the regulations are inoperable?

Do the Government intend to appeal or does the Secretary of State think that, rather than wasting the time of the criminal justice system, it is better to allow the public to make their own decision on whether to buy beef on the bone, taking into account all the risks?

Mr. Dewar: I saw Sheriff Paterson's judgment only this morning. In any event, it is the Crown Office that will decide whether to appeal on the basis of the arguments. The regulations remain in place and leave to appeal was given. This is an important matter. Clearly, it deserves careful consideration and it will get it, but, above all, health considerations will remain paramount.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is not the tragic case of Scott Simpson only one of a large number of issues that have dented public confidence in the police service in north-east Scotland? Does the Secretary of State accept that the public are mystified as to why democratic accountability does not seem to be easily enforced in the higher echelons of the police service, although I can tell him from experience that sergeants and constables have been subjected to draconian discipline in that very police force? What procedure does he think needs to be put into place, so that it is possible to sack a chief constable when there is justifiable cause, without going through all the difficulties that both he and the police board have faced over recent weeks and months?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the report of the Accounts Commission, which is to be published tomorrow, suggests that the Grampian force is bottom or near bottom of seven measures of efficiency in the police service? When will the matter be resolved? What measures need to be taken to improve the standards of accountability and will he guarantee that action will now follow?

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman will have gathered from recent events that I take these matters seriously. I repeat my point, which is important, that a balance must be struck. Sacking a chief constable is an exceptional and serious matter. That is why the 1967 Act builds in procedures that mean that it cannot be done on a whim or in a moment of anger.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the police board consists of elected members, who I believe take their duties seriously. They have had to wrestle with difficult problems in difficult circumstances, and I have some sympathy with them for that. They have come to a decision today and it is now a matter of how and in what way they wish to advance the matter. I repeat that I stand ready to help in any way that I can. I certainly agree that public confidence must be restored. I also accept that the problem is not just the Scott Simpson inquiry, although it reveals a sad catalogue of misunderstandings and missed opportunities, but the general judgment of the leadership in the Grampian force, which has been revealed in the report of the chief inspector of constabulary, which makes some trenchant criticisms of communication, management style and financial and other controls within the force.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Following what the Secretary of State just said, does he believe that it was in the interest of the criminal justice system that the serious and sensitive circumstances surrounding the Scott Simpson murder should have become the subject of a

personal and unseemly spat between the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office, and the chief constable of Grampian region, culminating in his own extraordinary public intervention yesterday? Would not the interests of this serious and sensitive case and of the criminal justice system have been better served with more dignity, gravitas and responsibility on all sides?

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman must make his own judgment. If there was any sort of spat, it was rather one-sided. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the energetic and totally justified way in which he called for an independent report. The results of that inquiry put beyond argument the fact that he was justified in so doing. On my intervention, I came to the conclusion—it was a personal decision, my own judgment and I stand by it—that I had to make my position clear in the circumstances, given the widespread anxiety and the damning nature of the two reports published yesterday.

Lockerbie

3. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What action the Crown Office has taken on the depositions and statements made by the Iranian defector, Mr. Abolghasem Mesbahi, to Mr. Gunter Rath, state prosecutor at Frankfurt, in relation to the Lockerbie bombing; and what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the Governments of the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany on the matter. [37615]

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): It would be inappropriate for the prosecuting or investigation authorities to give details of investigative steps that have been taken. I can assure my hon. Friend that appropriate action has been taken in co-operation with our German and American colleagues to investigate the allegations made by Abolghasem Mesbahi.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the Minister at least tell the House whether Mesbahi has been interrogated by the police in charge of the criminal investigation? If he has not, why not?

Mr. McLeish: With his usual courtesy, my hon. Friend has given me a copy of the letter concerning this question that he received recently from the Lord Advocate. I am afraid that I am unable to take the matter further other than to confirm to my hon. Friend that statements given by Mesbahi have been discussed with the German and American prosecuting and investigating authorities, as would be the case with any other significant matter. In the circumstances, I will be happy to pass on again to the Lord Advocate the comments of my hon. Friend.

NHS Trusts

4. **Mr. Douglas Alexander** (Paisley, South): What progress has been made in reducing the number of NHS trusts operating in Scotland. [37616]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): Detailed proposals for new trust configurations are currently the subject of public consultation in each health board area. Subject to the outcome of public consultation, I expect to be in a position to take decisions about the new configurations in late summer.

Mr. Alexander: How much investment are those changes likely to free up for patient care in Scotland?

Mr. Dewar: We hope that, over the course of this Parliament, it will be possible to redirect about £100 million to front-line patient care. When fully implemented, I hope that the dismantling of the internal market and the streamlining of the trusts will produce around £40 million a year. Major reform in the health service, as elsewhere, depends on teamwork, and I greatly value the efforts and commitment of the civil service. In particular, I pay tribute to my permanent secretary, Russell Hillhouse, who retires in a few days. He has been a skilful and expert guide, philosopher—indeed, friend—to me, and, I suspect, to many of my predecessors.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): On behalf of my colleagues, I endorse what the Secretary of State just said. Surely the consultation documents on health service trusts are a complete sham. It seems that, across Scotland, they are just going for a preferred option. Who on earth is being consulted, and why? Can the Secretary of State assure me that he or the Minister responsible for health will make the final decision on the trusts, as the Minister promised that it will be based on what best suits the needs of particular communities?

Mr. Dewar: We shall certainly listen to the consultation exercise. We shall also listen to hon. Members. I heard what the hon. Lady said. The plan is radical, but it is not a preconceived rigid framework into which every area will necessarily be fitted. Reducing the trusts from, I think, the present 46 to something under 30—depending on the results of the consultation exercise—makes sense and will provide a more efficient machine to drive patient care, but we shall, of course, listen to local opinion. While Ministers take the final decision, they will be influenced by what is said by the hon. Lady and others.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): How will the saving of £100 million affect waiting lists in our hospitals in Scotland?

Mr. Dewar: Waiting lists, which now stand at about 87,000, are a considerable worry to us, and our concern is apparent from the decision to allocate £44.5 million to bring them down. Our expectation is that they will be below their present level in a year's time. The £44 million is being used not only to depress waiting lists temporarily but to tackle the obstructions, the bottlenecks and the structural difficulties that have allowed waiting lists to rise to their present level. We shall want to keep that campaign going. I have no doubt that the additional funds will have a part to play in that, although I hope that the substantial saving by stopping the paper chase that is the internal market will be used on a wider spread of improvements than simply on waiting lists.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): What assurances can the Secretary of State give my constituents in the non-city areas of Angus and Perthshire, in implementing

the Government's desire to reduce the number of trusts, that health care services will not be concentrated in the major cities and that local services will continue in areas where people need them, in the county areas of Angus and Perthshire?

Mr. Dewar: As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, there is always a balance to be struck between centres of excellence and expertise and the need to spread throughout the community adequate and top-class health care. We certainly do not consider the streamlining of the trusts to be a death sentence for local hospitals and local centres of excellence. The use of GP co-operatives and reform of primary care functions are also designed to ensure that people who live in more remote communities always have adequate medical care within reach. That is important. I accept that entirely. We hope that we get the right balance. Again, it will be a matter for consultation. We shall look at acute service review and other matters.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Should not the aim of the reorganisation of NHS trusts be to look after the generation of people who built the national health service, far too many of whom were deprived of a national health service bed because of the previous Tory Government's agenda, which was to shift ever more people out of the NHS into private sector nursing homes? If so, will my right hon. Friend investigate the situation in the Forth Valley health board area where, under existing plans, by 2000 there will be an NHS bed for under 0.4 per cent. of the elderly population? Will he therefore intervene and change that agenda to ensure that there is an NHS bed for every elderly person who requires one?

Mr. Dewar: I certainly accept that there should be a national health service bed for everyone who requires one, although there may be some argument about how to define that term. I have much sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. The important thing is that there is adequate, supportive care tailored to the needs of the individual in whatever setting may be best for that individual. A great deal of emphasis is now placed on keeping people in the community if at all possible and in familiar surroundings. There is always a balance to be struck, but we are undoubtedly committed to investing in the health service. We are well aware that people from the older generation—I am beginning to have a pressing personal interest in the matter—have particular demands to make on the health service and have to be properly catered for.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On behalf of the official Opposition, I also offer my best wishes to Russell Hillhouse and wish him the very best of health for his retirement.

Does the Secretary of State understand the worries expressed by many general practitioners in Scotland that the Government's meddling in the overall structure of the NHS in Scotland will move influence from primary care back into the hands of hospital consultants, and that that will be a retrograde step? Will he accept personal responsibility if the change results in increased waiting lists, in decreased patient choice and in a decrease in doctors' freedom, as many in the health service are now predicting?

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in every particular, but it is of course a matter of judgment. I have talked to many GPs, and I did not get the impression that that was their opinion at all. The proposals in the White Paper have been widely welcomed by official bodies and individual GPs. I believe that the proposals will allow GPs to be very influential within the health service and will, if anything, increase patient choice. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that this year, for example, very nearly an additional £7 million is being invested in GP premises. Indeed, I had the pleasure of opening a new surgery at the edge of my constituency only the other day. I spoke to a range of general practitioners there, and I did not get any of the gloomy forebodings that darken the hon. Gentleman's mind.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the advent of the new primary care trusts and, within them, of the GP health co-operatives, will signal the end of the pernicious system of GP fundholding and of Tory attempts to create a two-tier national health service in Scotland? If he can confirm that, does he agree that the socialist principles that helped to establish the national health service are as relevant today as they were 50 years ago and that therefore what we need from a Labour Government is more of those old Labour ideas, not fewer?

Mr. Dewar: I can do better and give my hon. Friend a date: 1 April next year will see the end of that particular form of fundholding in Scotland. It is very important that we win the support and trust of the public because of our values, not despite our values. There is no more important set of values than the essential principles that the health service is comprehensive in cover, free at the point of delivery and pays no attention to the size of the patient's bank balance.

Millennium Compliance

5. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): What plans he has made to ensure that computer systems used by the emergency services in Scotland will be millennium compliant. [37617]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Sam Galbraith): In common with all NHS bodies in Scotland, the Scottish ambulance service has a strategy in place to tackle year 2000 computer date problems and is working to ensure the compliance of all critical systems by December 1998.

Mr. Blunt: I do not think that the House will be reassured by the vague nature of that answer. Can the Minister guarantee that all computer systems in the emergency services will be millennium compliant? Particularly in the light of yesterday's report in *The Scotsman* that up to 1,000 patients could die and that up to three quarters of Scotland's NHS trusts say that they will not have enough money to deal with the problem, will he guarantee that no one will die because the Scottish Office has invested insufficient resources?

Mr. Galbraith: I can confirm everything that the hon. Gentleman said. I can guarantee that all critical systems

will be compliant by the end of this year—a year ahead of the deadline—and that no one will suffer because of a lack of resources.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Although the answer has come from the Health Minister, the question related to emergency services. Can the Minister give an idea of the likely cost to all public services in Scotland? Has he secured satisfactory guarantees from the power generating system that there will not be critical failures? The Prime Minister has estimated the cost as £3 billion; private estimates are £6 billion. What will be the cost to the Scottish Office?

Mr. Galbraith: The final figures are not yet available as the returns had to be made by 31 March and we are still looking at them. We shall soon be in a position to provide definitive answers. However, we are monitoring the costs and we shall be able to meet them within the budget.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): It is a rather quaint idea that the ambulance service is the only emergency service in Scotland. Leaving that aside, are the Minister and his colleagues in the Scottish Office satisfied that the air traffic control system at Prestwick will be millennium compliant? What investigations are they making to ensure that?

Mr. Galbraith: The terms that apply to the Scottish ambulance service apply also to all emergency services, including the fire brigade and the police. As for air traffic control services, as someone of the right hon. Gentleman's standing and long service in the House should be aware, that is not a matter for me, but I shall pass it on to the Minister responsible.

Social Exclusion

7. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): What proposals he has to reduce social exclusion in rural areas and communities in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37620]

11. **Mr. Frank Roy** (Motherwell and Wishaw): If he will make a statement on the level of response to the consultation process on the social exclusion unit. [37624]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Calum Macdonald): The consultation paper on social exclusion has now generated over 200 responses. The Government are determined to tackle social exclusion in rural and urban areas through a range of policies, including welfare reform, education and training, health and housing policy.

Mr. Kirkwood: Has the Minister had a chance to study the recently published Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on poverty and exclusion in rural Britain? It shows that, by 1995, the proportion of those unemployed in rural areas was identical to that in non-rural areas, and that applies to men and women. It also reveals that poverty is prevalent among the self-employed, particularly in rural areas, and that the incidence of low pay is more common and more persistent in rural Britain than elsewhere. Can the Minister give the House an absolute assurance that the social exclusion unit will make rural conditions a central part of its study and work in the coming weeks and months on the ground that confining attention to cities and peripheral estates is not justified simply because rural poverty is less visible? Action needs to be taken.

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman is quite right, and I can give him the reassurance that he seeks. He rightly said that social exclusion occurs in rural areas as well as in urban areas and that rural areas may have a special dimension in respect of remoteness and difficulty of communication. The network will take all those factors into account. I have encouraged people who want to contribute to the consultation process to write to the Scottish Office.

Mr. Roy: May I remind the Minister of why we need a social exclusion unit? Yesterday afternoon, a 19-year-old man was brutally murdered 100 yd from my home. He came from a loving family, but he did not have the best breaks in life. The social exclusion unit addresses school truancy, drugs and crime. Will the Minister bear it in mind that it is needed to tackle those problems and ensure that all our young people have the safe life that they so richly deserve?

Mr. Macdonald: I do not think that I can add much to what my hon. Friend said, except to say that the whole House will share his sentiments. He makes the point powerfully that social exclusion is not an abstract concept or a theory—it has a direct impact on real people in real communities.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Does the Minister agree that nothing more quickly creates social exclusion in rural areas than a collapse in farm incomes such as that which has occurred under this Government—a collapse caused as much by their mishandling of the economy and the pound as by their lack of understanding of farming issues? What does the Minister intend to do about that? Or is rural despair part of his policy for the nationalists and the midges to feed on?

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman will know that rural incomes go up and down according to fluctuations in prices, and that happened when he was a member of the previous Government. I am sure that he would be the first to acknowledge that we are putting more investment into the farming community than any previous Government. We are supporting farming communities in what, as we appreciate, is a time of real difficulty.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I am surprised that my hon. Friend did not take the opportunity to remind the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) that it was his right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) who claimed, as Secretary of State for Social Security, that no such thing as poverty existed in this country. That is why we need a social exclusion unit. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has responsibility across education, health and housing, the Scottish Office is uniquely placed to deal with social exclusion in Scotland?

Mr. Macdonald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are the first Government to put tackling social

exclusion right at the heart of our policies, and we are putting money where our mouth is. Since 1 May, more than £900 million has been dedicated to programmes which will help to tackle social exclusion in, for example, education, health and housing.

Criminal Sentences

8. **Mr. Desmond Browne** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): What proposals he has to achieve consistency in sentencing in the criminal courts. [37621]

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): Sentencing is a matter for the courts. We have just published sentencing profiles for the Scottish courts in order to make sentencing information more widely available and to assist in consistency in sentencing practice.

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend will be aware that, even during the years of Tory obsession with prison building and longer prison sentences, there was one glaring inconsistency in sentencing—the disproportionate use of custody by the sheriffs in Kilmarnock sheriff court. However, since 1995—and thanks to the work of the social work department of East Ayrshire council—the sheriffs have been persuaded to make greater use of non-custodial sentences. My hon. Friend will be aware also that social work services and the criminal justice system are 100 per cent. funded by the Scottish Office, and that this year's allocation of grant—despite a national increase broadly in line with inflation—represents a 7.2 per cent. decrease for East Ayrshire council. In considering East Ayrshire council's submissions to him about that allocation, will my hon. Friend take into account the need to reinforce that trend in sentencing at Kilmarnock sheriff court?

Mr. McLeish: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, and I would like to put on record our appreciation of the work being done by East Ayrshire council's criminal justice and social work department. We need to find not uniformity, but consistency, in sentencing throughout Scotland. That is why my hon. Friend is absolutely right to emphasise non-custodial sentencing. We are endeavouring to do a great deal more than the previous Government in relation to that matter. We have provided £2.5 million for criminal justice and social work services this year, and I sincerely hope that we will be able to invest even more over the coming months.

In the Crime and Disorder Bill, the Government propose new measures to ensure that a wide variety of options is available to courts throughout the country. We have supervised attendance orders; we are about to embark on a pilot electronic tagging scheme; and we have community service sentences. We must make sure that dangerous prisoners are locked up in prisons but, on the other hand, we must make sure that we are using alternatives to custody as far as we can. They are cost-effective and they work, and we need a better balance. Our prison population of 6,300 is high, and overcrowding can lead to the undermining of our attempts to rehabilitate and provide other positive services in prisons.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Why does not the hon. Gentleman understand that, in abandoning plans for honesty in sentencing, and in failing to abolish automatic early release from prison, the Government are displaying not toughness on crime but serial wimpishness? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. McLeish: I shall not reflect on my hon. Friends' comments in response to the hon. Gentleman's question, but I will say that he is simply wrong. One cannot pretend to be pursuing a tough policy on law and order merely by sending more and more people to prison, regardless of the consequences. The point about abandoning parole is sheer nonsense, as the Opposition know—they will have to realise that the Government are moving forward with a progressive policy, under which people will be put behind bars when necessary but non-custodial alternatives will be sought for others.

Ms Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Can my hon. Friend offer an explanation for the dramatic increase in lock-up rates at Cornton Vale in recent months? Does he agree that sheriffs should consider alternatives to custody rather than continuing to lock up vulnerable women?

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend is right to express her concern about Cornton Vale—we, too, are concerned about the rising prison population there. We shall publish a report very soon, which will go some way to tackle the outstanding difficulties. As my hon. Friend suggested, we want to invest in alternatives to custody, which seems a sensible way forward not only for the people involved but for our prisons.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I welcome that answer, but does the Minister recognise that, to achieve equality of sentencing, we first have to catch the criminals? As has been said, morale is crucial to the effectiveness of the police force, so will he assure the House that he will give all the necessary support to Grampian police board to ensure the early appointment of a new chief constable? Will he assure us, too, that that chief constable will receive the resources and back-up to restore morale so that we can take advantage of the existence of a good-quality police force in that area?

Mr. McLeish: I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. We hope that the new chief constable will be in place as soon as possible, which will be a tremendous boost to the force. Morale and public confidence are vital, and, in the aftermath of recent events, we hope to work in partnership to secure those objectives.

New Deal

9. **Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): What progress has been made on the new deal in Scotland. [37622]

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): The new deal came on stream throughout Scotland on 6 April, having had a successful pathfinder area in Tayside since 4 January.

Miss Begg: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that the measure of the success of the new deal in Scotland will be the number of young people who become more employable and find permanent jobs. There is a hard core of young people who are very disillusioned,

however. There are many such youngsters in Aberdeen, where, despite the fact that unemployment is slightly lower than in other areas of Scotland, youngsters tend to be unemployed and may not have the qualities that employers seek. Is there any evidence—I accept that it may be anecdotal at this stage—that these hard-to-place youngsters are being given extra opportunities and are succeeding under the new deal where previous schemes have failed them?

Mr. Wilson: There is a great deal of evidence from the Tayside pathfinder area and from other experiences—the evidence is growing—that young people have a tremendous willingness to recognise that the new deal is different from, and better financed than, anything that has gone before, and that it is carefully tailored to their individual needs. On that basis, I am sure that my hon. Friend is right—the new deal will ensure not only that more people are employed, but that an awful lot of young people are employable, which is their first hurdle on the way, ultimately, to the world of work.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): I hope that the Minister will accept that prevention is better than cure, and that some of the available resources should be put into careers guidance in schools and into enabling people who have missed out on such services to develop self-esteem and the ability to benefit from training. Will he help people to reach the threshold where they can benefit from the training that is provided?

Mr. Wilson: Absolutely—the careers service is fully involved in the delivery of the new deal. For many young people, the challenge is not simply to go directly into work, although many will do so—more than 100 young people have already found long-term employment in Dundee through the new deal. The challenge for the many others is to get over the hurdle of confidence and self-esteem, and to recognise that someone really is working to find an opportunity that is right for them—I assure the hon. Gentleman that that is exactly what the new deal is about.

Mrs. Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Many young people are putting a great deal of faith in the new deal, as we have asked them to do. What steps are being taken to ensure that the partnerships involved in delivering the new deal are robust, and to evaluate and monitor those partnerships?

Mr. Wilson: An immense amount of work is going on in Scotland to ensure that the partnerships in every area are strong. Everyone is involved: the Employment Service, the enterprise companies, the careers services and the further education sector are all working well together. Centrally, the Employment Service and the Scottish Office are in touch with the partnerships to ensure that everything is going well. It is important that there should be a quality control mechanism for the young people themselves, so there will be a hotline to ensure that any abuses of the new deal can be reported. Another important factor is that in every area we have involved the trade unions in monitoring the programme's quality.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Scotland Bill

29. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will make a statement on the Lord Chancellor's role in drafting the Scotland Bill. [37643]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As chairman of the ministerial committee on devolution to Scotland, Wales and the English regions, the Lord Chancellor was much involved in securing collective agreement to the policy content of the Scotland Bill. The actual drafting of the legislation, as is normal practice, was carried out by parliamentary counsel, on instruction from the Scottish Office, acting under ministerial direction.

Mr. Dalyell: If *The Times* is to be believed, the Lord Chancellor himself claimed,

"I wrote it. All of it"—

"it" being the Scotland Bill. Who will be responsible for Lockerbie—Holyrood or Westminster, the Crown Office or the Lord Chancellor's Department? In the light of the answer to Question 3 to the Secretary of State for Scotland this afternoon, and the lazy attitude of the Crown Office over the years, some of us hope that it will be the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. Hoon: All criminal prosecutions in Scotland proceed at the instance of the Lord Advocate of the day. That will remain the case after the devolution legislation comes into force. More broadly, the handling of the international aspects of the Lockerbie incident, including any Security Council matters, is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

In any further proceedings in the International Court of Justice, the United Kingdom will be represented by a team selected in the usual way by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. At present, the Lord Advocate leads the team, and I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend that he has no plans to change that arrangement.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Minister seriously saying, as his Scottish Office colleagues declined to say in response to earlier questions, that if the Scottish Parliament decided to accede to the move to hold such a trial in another country but under Scottish jurisdiction, Westminster would try to frustrate such a move, which is widely supported by public opinion in Scotland, and even by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who at last has found a reason for supporting a Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me yet further from my proper ministerial responsibilities. I am sure that if he renews his question to my right hon. and hon. Friends who are responsible for those matters, they will give him a full answer.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): On the matter of gender balance in the new Scottish Parliament and

whether the law should be changed to achieve it, have the Government taken the Lord Chancellor's advice or the entirely conflicting advice of Ms Cherie Booth QC?

Mr. Hoon: I am tempted to respond to that ingenious question by referring the hon. Lady to the answer that I gave a few moments ago; but the answer is neither.

Departmental Advisers

30. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): If he will make a statement on his policy towards the recruitment of *(a)* special, *(b)* policy, *(c)* press and *(d)* public relations advisers to his Department. [37644]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The special adviser to the Lord Chancellor was appointed in accordance with the terms and conditions of the model contract for special advisers, a copy of which is available in the Library. The recruitment of all permanent staff, including those working in policy, press and public relations, is carried out in line with the standard procedures set out in the civil service management code and the civil service commissioners recruitment code.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Minister tell the House the exact cost to the British taxpayer of the additional advisers the Lord Chancellor has recruited to his Department since 1 May? Whatever the cost, does he accept that that is yet another extravagance from the self-styled Cardinal Wolsey, who needs those additional advisers to cover up his misdemeanours and incompetences?

Mr. Hoon: Only one special adviser has been appointed to the Department since last May and I will write to the hon. Gentleman giving him the precise cost. I must make it clear that the appointment was made by the Lord Chancellor strictly in accordance with the usual procedures. Successive Administrations have appointed special advisers in precisely the same way. As someone appointed as a special adviser on three different occasions and, I understand, in three different Government Departments, no doubt the hon. Gentleman is something of an expert on the matter.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the Minister be good enough to tell the House on which aspects of the Department's policy he and his Cabinet colleague most feel in need of advice?

Mr. Hoon: As the hon. and learned Member will know, the Lord Chancellor's Department is comprehensively reviewing civil court procedure. The special adviser in question has had a distinguished career in the law and will be able to give the Department valuable experience based on his considerable knowledge of the legal process.

Immigration Appeal Tribunal

32. **Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): If he will make a statement on the backlog of cases before the immigration appeal tribunal. [37646]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The backlog of outstanding adjudicator appeals is starting to come down. It has fallen by 5,670 appeals since the end of July 1997—from a total of 34,909 then to 29,237 at the end of February 1998. The abolition of the primary purpose rule, the appointment of more adjudicators and the better listing of cases are factors making that reduction possible.

Mr. Vaz: I am grateful for that answer and I congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary on the work that has been done to reduce the backlog of cases before the tribunal, but does he accept that any delay in processing the cases causes enormous distress to applicants? Someone who is refused permission in, for example, Bombay still has to wait a year and a half before his or her spouse entry case is considered in either Birmingham or London. Will my hon. Friend consider targeting resources more effectively to cut that backlog, and also the necessity for more new information technology equipment, which it is to be hoped would allow information coming from a post abroad to be brought to the tribunal as quickly as possible?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. Certainly, it is important that we continue to bear down on the backlog of cases, and since my appointment to this position I have been grateful for the valuable help and advice that he has been able to give me. We need to continue to work on the matter. There is, however, no necessity for applicants within the United Kingdom to wait for such periods provided that they are willing to go from London to the provinces. Although there is a considerable backlog of cases in London, waiting times at other hearing centres are much shorter, and anyone who wants a case to be dealt with urgently can say that it should be transferred elsewhere.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Is not the reality that the backlog of appeals is getting worse? At the moment, we have some 100 applications for asylum each day, excluding dependants, and more than 50,000 asylum applications are still awaiting an initial determination. All applications have to go to an appeal, and it seems to me that the Government's problems are getting worse and that they are not acting to solve them. Does the Parliamentary Secretary intend to appoint more immigration adjudicators, or to grant any form of amnesty? He must agree that the asylum appeals in the pipeline are vast in number and that matters are getting worse by the day.

Mr. Hoon: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for the appeals process. The backlog is being reduced. The immigration appellate authorities aim to deal with up to 31,000 asylum appeals in the current financial year. That is a projected increase of some 40 per cent. over the previous year.

Asylum Seekers

33. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): What provision his Department is making for asylum appellants who have no means to pay fees for legal representation at the hearing of their appeals against refusal of refugee status. [37647]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Legal aid is not available for representation before the immigration appeal tribunal. Asylum seekers can receive legal advice and assistance under the green form scheme, including help in preparation for the hearing and the attendance at the hearing of a Mackenzie adviser. The Home Office funds the Immigration Advisory Service and the Refugee Legal Centre, which provide advice to asylum seekers and, in some cases, representation at hearings.

Mr. Gerrard: Does my hon. Friend agree that good-quality legal representation at appeals is in everyone's best interest? As the Home Office has not been able to renew spend-to-save funding for the Immigration Advisory Service and the Refugee Legal Centre, is there not a danger that fewer asylum seekers will be represented properly and that more will end up in the clutches of unqualified so-called advisers? Will he keep the situation under review and consider the case for legal aid to ensure that people are properly represented in such appeals?

Mr. Hoon: The Government share my hon. Friend's concerns. That is why the whole system is being reviewed. The first step will be to resolve the inconsistencies in approach at different stages in the appeals process which appear to allow the unscrupulous to exploit the system and create backlogs that leave genuine asylum seekers facing long periods of uncertainty. Once we have an improved process, we can consider the best way to provide legal help to asylum seekers while promoting the effective operation of the system overall.

Civil Justice Review

34. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): If he will make a statement on progress of the civil justice review and legal aid reforms. [37649]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Since I responded to a similar question from my hon. Friend on 17 March, there have been certain developments. First, the Lord Chancellor has proposed to the rule committee that the small claims general limit should be £5,000, with a limit of £1,000 for personal injury and housing disrepair cases. Secondly, we have announced a comprehensive review of the enforcement of civil court judgments. We are still receiving responses to our consultation paper on conditional fees and legal aid. The consultation period closes on 30 April this year.

Mr. Dismore: The recognition of the problems with certain sorts of personal injury work, particularly medical negligence, in the Minister's paper on conditional fees is welcome. However, there are many other difficult sorts of cases, such as industrial disease cases. In his further consideration of representations, will he bear that in mind in deciding what cases should qualify for the transitional fund?

Mr. Hoon: I am again grateful to my hon. Friend for his assistance. We have provided a wide range of opportunities for those with an interest in these matters to make representations. We have met many firms and representative groups. We have commissioned research based on hypothetical exercises in which a wide range of lawyers took part. We are conducting a detailed analysis of the information that we have gathered and expect to make an announcement in due course.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Will the Minister say whether his Department is considering different merits tests for different categories of claim and when it will publish its views on the matter?

Mr. Hoon: We are considering a variable merits test. We will proceed to consultation on that once a paper is published.

Magistrates Courts

35. **Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): If he will make a statement on his Department's policy in respect of the geographical distribution of magistrates courts. [37651]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): In accordance with section 56 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997, decisions on the provision of magistrates courts are for the relevant magistrates courts committee to determine after consultation with its local paying authority. Each magistrates courts committee has a statutory responsibility to provide an efficient and effective service to court users. It is for the individual magistrates courts committee to decide the number and location of court houses.

Mr. Russell: That is a disappointing answer, but it fits with previous answers. The Department does not know how many courts it has shut, let alone which are left. It is time that the Government worked out where magistrates courts are and discussed what is happening with hon. Members of all parties. Does the Minister agree that large-scale closures are taking place against the wishes of local communities? There does not seem to be a policy at all.

Mr. Hoon: I have answered that and similar questions from the hon. Gentleman on previous occasions. I understood that he represented a party that believed in local decision making: I should have thought he would support the approach that both this Administration and previous Administrations had set out.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): But does the Minister accept that the essence of successful magistrates court justice is that it should be local justice and that the tradition over hundreds of years in this country has been that local justices of the peace in a local court know their area best and often know the criminals and how best to deal with the local regular offenders? Is not the Minister simply washing his hands of the matter? Should not the Government take note of the concern in so many communities around the country about the threats of closure of magistrates courts?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman knows the process full well. It is for local magistrates courts committees to take a decision as to the location and number of court houses

that they retain within their jurisdiction. In the event of their making a decision and a proposal for closure, it is for the local paying authority to determine whether it appeals. Only if there is an appeal do central Government become involved. In those circumstances, one of the factors taken into account by the Lord Chancellor in deciding whether to accept the appeal is the importance of local justice. Precisely the points that the hon. Gentleman has made will be taken into account in making that decision.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It will have been within your hearing that, in his answer to my supplementary question to Question 3 during Scottish questions, the Minister of State referred to the Crown Office rather in terms of a separate entity which had not much to do with him or his Scottish Office ministerial colleagues. In a sense he is right, because the Crown Office is a different entity, but does it not raise yet again the unsatisfactory position?

If Members of Parliament think that the Crown Office has been lazy, as it may or may not have been in relation to Lockerbie and Mr. Mesbahi, there is no way in which we in the House of Commons can challenge the Minister responsible in order to get to the truth or otherwise of what we are suggesting. Even come a Scottish Parliament, the same problem will arise with the establishment of this Advocate General person. Is it not an on-going problem that should have your attention?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order at all. I fear that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to prolong questions or, more pertinently, discussions on the Scotland Bill, which are not a matter for me at this stage.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know of the great concern around the country about the state of readiness of Government Departments and agencies for the year 2000 computer problem. I am sure that, like me, you will have welcomed the clear and honest statement by the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), that he will personally guarantee the emergency services in Scotland, and guarantee that not a single life will be put in jeopardy by the failure of the emergency services to be millennium compliant. We now have not only a Minister clearly identified—

Madam Speaker: Order. I fear that I am not going to go on listening to long statements by Back Benchers which are not points of order.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order must relate to matters that concern me, and that one certainly does not.

BILL PRESENTED

NORTHERN IRELAND (ELECTIONS)

Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Cook, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Dewar, Mr. Secretary Robertson, Mr. Secretary Davies and Mr. Paul Murphy, presented a Bill to make provision for the establishment of the New Northern Ireland Assembly and for the election of its members: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 173].

Deregulation of Racecourses

3.33 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the deregulation of racecourses.

In introducing this Bill, I am required to declare an interest. I am a member of Cheltenham race course, which costs me considerably more money than it brings in. As a result of my interest in racing, my family and I receive hospitality from race courses and connected organisations.

I should like to be able to claim that the Bill is a major piece of legislation, but I hope that the fact that it is not will not mean that the House hesitates to give me leave to introduce it. In fact, the Bill is supported by hon. Members from three political parties in the House, and I am grateful to all of them for that support. I am also grateful to the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who has been extremely helpful and encouraging during our discussions. I should also like to place on record my thanks to those at the British Horseracing Board—which featured deregulation in its financial plan—the Racecourse Association, the Tote, and Cheltenham race course for the help that they have given me in preparing the Bill.

The Bill would deregulate race courses in Great Britain, so that they might be in a better position to exercise the measures of self-help that the racing industry itself, encouraged by the Government, recognises it needs to pursue. Before turning to the detail of the Bill, I hope that the House will allow me to describe the background that makes the introduction of such a Bill so necessary.

The horse racing and bloodstock industry is extremely important to this country. In all, racing and betting combined secures employment for more than 100,000 people, and racing provides the Exchequer with a contribution in taxation of almost £500 million a year. Five million people attend race meetings each year, and racing and horse race betting have a combined turnover of more than £5 billion a year.

The racing industry has assets of £2 billion, and contributes more than £90 million a year in exports. In my constituency of Tewkesbury, the Cheltenham race course at Prestbury Park has an annual turnover of £10 million, and when the income received by guest houses, pubs, restaurants and hotels is added, the value of racing to my constituency alone becomes immeasurable.

There are those who say that all in racing is going well, and yet another successful Cheltenham festival last month might encourage such a point of view; but, alas, all is not well in racing. Many smaller courses—those where owners, trainers, jockeys and horses start their careers—are not doing so well. Crucially, prize money at those courses is low, often yielding as little as £1,300 for the winner of a race. Given that the annual upkeep of a horse is about £14,000, it does not require much knowledge of racing to realise that the ownership of race horses is a very expensive activity, but that, without owners, racing would not exist.

In Britain, owners recover only an average of 24 per cent. of their outlay each season. That compares with 47 per cent. in the United States, 49 per cent. in

[Mr. Laurence Robertson]

France, 61 per cent. in South Africa and 90 per cent. in Japan. Therein lies the crucial point: low prize money means low returns to owners, which puts vital investment in race horse ownership under threat—so much so that Sheikh Mohammed, a major race horse owner, recently said that, unless there were positive signs of progress and the possibility of change, he would seek to reduce his racing and breeding presence in Britain. As he so pertinently put it:

"My hope, and that of other owners and breeders on smaller scales, is that after we have emptied our pockets, we are at least allowed to keep the lining."

The loss of such a key investor in British racing would be extremely damaging, but this week the racing industry suffered shock waves from the news that Sheikh Mohammed is already planning to transfer the training of 100 two-year-olds to France. That is bad news for employment and the industry in general, and, unless more money finds its way into racing, such news will become epidemic. We can no longer ignore the warning signs; we have to address the problems in the racing industry, and we have to address them now. That is what the Bill would begin to do.

Let me clear about one point: racing asks for and needs no subsidies from Government. However, there is much else that the Government can do to help racing and I am having separate discussions with the Minister about those issues. One of the ways in which the Government can help racing is by allowing it to help itself.

Too much regulation, for far too long, has tied the hands of race courses, limiting them to using their enormous assets for, on average, only 20 days a year—5 per cent. of their time. Does any other business in the country use its buildings, machinery and land for only 5 per cent. of the year? Yet race courses are effectively limited to doing exactly that, due to regulation. Many people ask, "Why are race courses used so infrequently? Why can they not generate more of their own income?" Well, they are prevented from doing so partly by regulation.

The Bill is about removing those restrictions. It is about deregulating race courses, so that they can help themselves; so that they can generate more of their own revenue; and so that they can increase the prize money on offer, thereby doing their bit to help to safeguard the future of racing in this country.

Briefly, the Bill seeks to allow race courses to do on non-race days what they do on race days—hardly revolutionary, is it, but it will help race courses to generate additional revenue. For example, when the grand national is being run at Aintree, other race courses should be able to set up large screens for people to watch the race. They should be able to take Tote and other bets on the outcome of the race, and run amusement and prize machines; and they should be able to provide food and drink for individuals and families who attend. They should be able to do all that, but at the moment they cannot.

Cheltenham race course, for example, can operate fully only if racing is taking place at Cheltenham that day. It cannot make maximum use of its considerable assets in the way I described on the back of racing at, say, Aintree, or during the World cup this summer. My Bill would enable it to do so.

My Bill is hardly a major measure. It seeks to make only minor changes to current legislation, but those changes will provide race courses with the potential to increase their income significantly. It will also reduce unnecessary restrictions, clarify the law, cut bureaucracy, and enable race courses to be set free to determine their own destiny.

The regulations restricting race courses can largely be found in the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963. Section 6(1) allows horse race courses to carry out bookmaking on non-race days, provided that bookmaking has not been carried out on that course more than seven times in the previous 12 months. However, given that race courses did not hold as many meetings in those days as they do now, the legislation was probably drafted to enable the courses to do exactly what my Bill proposes they should be able to do. In other words, only the passing of time and the development of race course business has caused a problem. The Bill aims to address that problem, and, in doing so, to clarify and modernise the law in this respect.

The Bill will simplify the law; it will thereby enable race courses to do on non-race days what they can already do on race days; it will provide race courses with the opportunity to exercise self-help measures; and, in doing so, it will offer the racing industry the opportunity to increase its income significantly, thereby helping to safeguard the future of Britain's third most popular sport.

The Bill is just one of many small measures that Parliament needs to take to help the racing industry to help itself.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Laurence Robertson, Mr. Owen Paterson, Mr. Richard Page, Mr. Desmond Swayne, Mr. James Paice, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. Nigel Jones, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Mr. Lindsay Hoyle and Mr. Richard Spring.

DEREGULATION OF RACECOURSES

Mr. Laurence Robertson accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the deregulation of racecourses: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 174].

Finance (No. 2) Bill

[Relevant documents: The Fourth Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 1997–98, on the 1998 Budget (HC 647).]

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley).

3.44 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is the second Finance Bill of the Parliament, and it continues the process of modernising the British economy with the objective of raising the sustainable rate of long-term growth, and ensuring that everyone has a share in rising prosperity.

The Bill implements the second Budget of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Budget which will help to turn ambition into achievement, and which encourages work, promotes enterprise and supports families. Like the Budget, it takes an unashamedly long-term view. There are no quick fixes. Instead, the Bill introduces radical reform designed to bring about long-term gain for the country.

We have made it clear that, first, we need to build economic stability, with a commitment to low inflation and sound public finances. That is the essential foundation for building long-term growth and rising prosperity.

Secondly, we are determined to promote enterprise. The Bill introduces a range of tax initiatives to boost investment, helping small firms and promoting research and development.

Thirdly, we are determined to modernise the welfare system. Our objective of sustainable growth needs a highly skilled and trained work force. We are determined to end the waste of resources when people want to work but face needless barriers to so doing. We want to encourage work by making it pay.

Fourthly, to create a fairer, and therefore more efficient, society, the Government are introducing measures to support families and to protect the environment.

The Bill builds on the first Finance Bill of the Parliament, which introduced the new deal, which is already helping the young and long-term unemployed back into work. It continues with measures to promote enterprise, with further reforms to the corporation tax system. This year, it introduces long-overdue reform to the capital gains tax regime, to encourage investment and innovation.

The Bill, along with other measures, continues to reverse the desperate situation that we inherited. Almost one year ago, we inherited a situation in which 18 years of instability had destroyed many businesses. The Opposition's amendment refers to a "golden economic legacy". Let us consider the legacy that we inherited, and the nonsense it is.

The Government inherited a national debt which had doubled in six years. We were spending £25 billion a year servicing the debt left by the previous Government—more than we spend on schools. We inherited a situation in which BSE will cost Britain some £5 billion—money which could be far better spent on schools, hospitals and other services. The previous Government left a situation in which they were planning to spend £19 billion more than they were due to get in. It is only our deficit reduction plan that is reversing that situation.

The "golden economic legacy" is about as real as Nigel Lawson's "economic miracle" of the 1980s. They both come from the same stable. The previous Government constantly deluded themselves, and tried to delude the rest of the country—until they were finally found out.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What did the Prime Minister mean when, as leader of the Labour party during the election campaign, he said that a Labour Government would have no need to raise taxes, apart from the windfall tax, because their programme was fully funded?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister meant exactly what he said. We said in our manifesto that we would not raise the basic or the top rate of income tax during the course of the Parliament, and we have kept that promise. We said that we would cut the rate of VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent., and we kept that promise as well. We also said that we would introduce a windfall tax on the privatised utilities, and we kept that promise as well.

I caution the hon. Gentleman not to lecture us about promises, because he will recall that one of the many reasons why his party is reduced to its present state is that the electorate rumbled the fact that it constantly made promises which it then broke, whether on income tax, VAT or any other taxes. We well remember the 22 Tory tax rises which, as much as anything, contributed to the defeat of the Conservative Government.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: Yes, of course I shall give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I wondered when he would appear.

Mr. Clarke: I think that this passage is always put in merely to provoke me, but I am grateful to the Chief Secretary for once more giving way so frequently so early in his speech. He has repeated yet again the claim that the previous Government were planning to borrow £19 billion. He refers back to the last forecast we made. As he knows, it, like the forecasts that the Government made last July and last November, was too prudent.

The strength of the economy and the flow of revenues have brought down borrowing much faster than expected. The only contribution that the Government have made to the speeding up of progress towards balance is £6 billion or £7 billion of extra taxation on business and savings. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) said, that was never promised, and is doing great harm to business.

Mr. Darling: Whenever I mention the 22 Tory tax rises, the right hon. and learned Gentleman hears the call and canters into the Chamber to speak.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made clear last July and in his Budget in March, we have taken substantial measures to reduce the deficit we inherited, so

[Mr. Darling]

that we can move into balance in the next two years. The right hon. and learned Gentleman complains that there has been a degree of fiscal tightening. Of course there has, and I am glad that he recognises that we are prudent and that we have introduced a substantial degree of such tightening, which was necessary to ensure that the economy could grow at a sustainable rate.

I make no apology for taking the steps necessary to reduce borrowing and to tighten the fiscal situation to a prudent level, which commentators increasingly recognise as exactly the right judgment, and what is required for the economy at present.

I repeat that we inherited an unsustainable economic situation. I remind Conservative Members that, during their 18 years in power, the previous Government were forced to raise taxes because of economic failure. They began in 1979 by doubling VAT, when they said that they would not do so. At the end of their term of office, they put VAT on domestic fuel, when they had promised that they would not do so.

In contrast, we cut VAT on domestic fuel, and this year we are reducing to 5 per cent. the rate of VAT on the installation of energy-saving materials, which has been widely welcomed. We inherited not only an unsustainable economic situation, but deep-seated economic and social problems. Nearly one household in five of working age had no one in work; there was a second generation of people without work; there was rising inequality between rich and poor; and one child in three were growing up in poverty.

In this country, poor families brought up children who were themselves poor in later life. They were condemned to a life with no hope, and were pushed to one side and forgotten by the previous Government. The golden legacy that the Opposition tell us we inherited was one in which public services were starved of investment and there were shortages in schools.

The previous Government unashamedly backed the few at the expense of the many. That is why we scrapped the assisted places scheme and invested the money in cutting class sizes, and why we scrapped the nursery voucher scheme and provided places for all four-year-olds. In our year in office, we have provided an additional £2.5 billion for schools, which is a real-terms increase in education spending that would not have taken place but for the change of Government.

We inherited a situation in which the health service was struggling to meet its obligations, despite the efforts of those who work in it. We have not only increased investment, but have scrapped the internal market. We saved more than £100 million last year by getting rid of red tape and putting the money into front-line patient care—yet another manifesto promise has been delivered. Since the election, we have invested a further £2 billion in the NHS, in its 50th anniversary year.

We took over from a Government who lacked ambition, and whose objective was getting by, that day or that week. As Norman Lamont, the former Conservative Chancellor, said, they were in office but not in power. We knew that we would inherit a mess, and we are sorting it out, which is why we take a long-term view. This year's Budget and the Bill continue the process of rebuilding this country.

The essential precondition for long-term sustainable growth is economic stability and a commitment to openness and transparency in the management of the economy. That is why we are committed to ensuring over the cycle that the Government meet the golden rule: borrow to invest, not to fund current spending. We shall ensure that debt is kept at a prudent and stable ratio. Clauses 151 and 152 of the Bill will implement for the first time a code for fiscal stability that will ensure that fiscal policy is set in this country's long-term interests.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): The Minister speaks of long-term interests. To assist the long-term planning of many of my constituents who contract to the oil industry, can he say when the Chancellor plans to publish his consultation paper on the future of oil taxation?

Mr. Darling: The consultation document will be published shortly, and I am glad to say that that again keeps a promise that I made on behalf of the then Opposition when the previous Government were changing the petroleum revenue tax regime. At that time, I said that, if longer-term changes to the North sea oil taxation regime were to be made, there ought to be widespread consultation. The fact that we are consulting has been broadly welcomed. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the consultation document will shortly be released, to give the industry and everybody with an interest as much time as possible to comment, so that we can take suggestions on board.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The Minister speaks about industry. Has he any concept of the plight of manufacturing at this time, and the threat to its investment and employment from the high value of sterling? Does he agree with the Governor of the Bank of England that if, in his first Budget last year, the Chancellor had introduced incentives for savings and constrained consumption instead of doing exactly the opposite—taxing savings and reducing consumption taxes—interest rates would not have had to be raised to their current level, and sterling would not now be as high?

Mr. Darling: I read the exchange between the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Select Committee on the Treasury, in which most of this ground was covered. As not all hon. Members are on that Select Committee, I shall deal with some of the hon. Gentleman's points. Interest rates should have been raised towards the end of the previous Parliament, but they were not, because the then Chancellor of the Exchequer judged it inappropriate—I believe that that was because of the impending general election. He put electoral considerations before those of the economy, and that is why interest rates have had to go up.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) will know that two thirds of the appreciation of sterling took place before the general election. To a substantial degree, sterling has appreciated because of conditions not in this country but elsewhere, and particularly in the rest of Europe. Sterling has not changed much against the dollar. It has clearly appreciated against the deutschmark, but in many respects that is because of what is happening in the rest of Europe.

We have made it clear that we intend to do whatever is necessary in the long-term interests of this country. The last thing that manufacturing or any other industry wants is a return to boom and bust, or to a Government who panic and react to day-to-day pressures rather than taking the long-term view. Reducing inflation to the Government's target of 2.5 per cent. is in Britain's long-term interests. Despite what the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford says, we have tightened the fiscal stance by some 2 per cent. of national income. That is a considerable amount of tightening, and, as the hon. Gentleman will no doubt recall, it was discussed at length in the Select Committee.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's measures are right. Many were critical of the Budget in July, but they subsequently realised that my right hon. Friend's judgment was right. It will also be right this time. I repeat that our actions in setting up the Monetary Policy Committee, ensuring low inflation and looking to the future, and the other measures to which I am about to turn, are essential to establish the stable long-term platform that industry wants.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Far from it being proven that the previous Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), made a mistake by not raising interest rates before the general election, is it not becoming increasingly evident, as many economic commentators are saying, that we are heading for recession next year rather than an inflationary problem? The economy is in danger of going out of control precisely because of the Government's mistake in their first week in office in separating control of fiscal policy from monetary policy. As a result, interest rates have gone unnecessarily high. Despite what the Minister says, the money supply is not now under sufficient control.

Mr. Darling: I do not accept that at all. Our decision to give the Bank of England operational independence was absolutely right. It is one of the most open and accountable central banks anywhere. It is remarkable that this country's long-term interest rates, which are a measure of the market's expectations, are at their lowest level for more than 33 years. The hon. Gentleman is one of the few Members who were in the House when interest rates were previously that low—indeed, I think that a Labour Government were in power at the time. Long-term interest rates are decreasing.

The hon. Gentleman referred to economic commentators. He must be aware that the vast majority of economic commentators felt that our action within days of entering office to give the Bank operational independence was absolutely right. I am sure that, by the end of this Parliament—when people judge us and see what we have done throughout the economic management sector—the decision to give the Bank operational independence, together with the other steps that the Chancellor has taken, will have been proved to be absolutely right and in the interests of the economy's long-term growth.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): In the Chief Secretary's judgment, have interest rates reached their peak? Can exporters and manufacturers expect any further increases, or a change to a downward pattern?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman tempts me, but such speculation would be unhelpful. What I will say is that most industrialists and most people in manufacturing industry realise why interest rates have been going up. They know that there were inflationary pressures in the economy, which had not been dealt with by the previous Government and which we inherited.

When the books were opened shortly after 1 May, it was obvious that inflation was going to rise way above the then Government's target. It was necessary to take the appropriate action to get that under control. I repeat: the setting up of the Monetary Policy Committee has been widely welcomed, as has the drop in long-term rates.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Darling: I shall, but then I must make some progress, because I am sure that many other hon. Members want to contribute.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My right hon. Friend has said that long-term rates are at their lowest level for 33 years. Is that drop in any way due to expectations on monetary union?

Mr. Darling: I believe that the reason why the UK's long-term rates have fallen—and bear in mind that they are a lot higher than other rates in the rest of Europe—is confidence in this country's economy. Clearly the markets have expectations in relation to monetary union in other countries, but that drop and other factors show that the markets have greater confidence in the management of the UK economy than they have had for many years.

Not just the establishment of the Monetary Policy Committee but other actions are necessary to ensure that we can achieve long-term sustainable growth. For far too long, the British economy has been held back by capacity constraints. We have had expansion, but it has been followed by constraint because of lack of capacity. To increase sustainable growth levels, we needed to deal with that problem, so this Budget encourages work. It makes work pay.

Measures will shortly be brought before the House to implement the working families tax credit, as will measures to reform the national insurance system. They will mean that barriers to work, which have faced so many people, will be removed, which will encourage employment. The new deal is being extended to provide employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed, partners of the unemployed, the long-term sick and disabled, and disadvantaged communities. All that will help to increase economic capacity.

The working families tax credit is a major reform to the tax system. It is necessary because the labour market has changed almost beyond recognition from that of 20 or 30 years ago. It is nonsense that, throughout the country, firms report skill shortages, when, at the same time, a large pool of people are willing and able to work, but far too often find that work simply does not pay. Those reforms, with our increased investment in education, training and skills, will all ensure that our labour market can meet this country's needs in the next century.

Mr. Gibb: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: I will make some progress; then I shall certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

[Mr. Darling]

As I have said, clause 25 keeps our promise to hold the basic and top rates of income tax. This year, we are setting the married couple's allowance at 10 per cent. from April 1999, which enables us to channel more support where it is needed most—to families with children. What matters is need, and that is where resources will go in the future. Our primary aim is to support families through supporting children.

I said that we inherited a situation in which one child in three grow up in poverty. The Budget, together with the Bill, increases support for all families with children, to begin to tackle that child poverty. From April next year, child benefit for the eldest child goes up by £2.50 a week, and there is an equivalent increase for poorer families, which increases the family premium of income support and jobseeker's allowance.

The new child care tax credit will pay 70 per cent. of the cost of child care, up to the limit of eligible costs of £100 a week for one child or £150 for two or more children. All those things will make it easier for people to get into work, especially families with children, who in the past have found the costs of child care a significant barrier.

Mr. Gibb: The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit. This is the Second Reading of the Finance Bill. Where are those issues mentioned in the Bill?

Mr. Darling: Had the hon. Gentleman been paying attention to what I said just five minutes ago, instead of bobbing up and down in his seat, he would have heard me say that we will be introducing measures to implement various aspects of the reforms in the near future. If he will contain himself, I want to return to measures that are in the Bill, which he will no doubt be keen to support.

Side by side with the labour market reforms goes the need to promote enterprise, which is an essential part of any economic policy. The Bill further reforms the corporation tax regime. Clauses 28 and 29 confirm that the main corporation tax rate will fall from 31 per cent. this year to 30 per cent. next year—the lowest rate ever. The Bill abolishes advance corporation tax from 1999. We have put in place a corporation tax regime which will encourage long-term investment. That reform that has been widely welcomed.

Of course, our reforms mean that decisions whether to retain or distribute profits lie with management and investors, not with the tax man. We have removed a distortion from the tax system, and the reforms are in the long-term interest of business.

There is a comprehensive package to create a more dynamic small business sector. The small business tax rate is cut by 1 per cent., to 20 per cent. from next year. Clause 119 introduces long-overdue reform to the capital gains tax system, including an effective 10 per cent. rate for business assets held over 10 years, to encourage more long-term investment.

As the Chancellor has said, both the main and small business corporation tax rates will be held at the new levels or lower for the lifetime of this Parliament—an undertaking that was never given by the previous Government.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): On the subject of capital gains tax, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government will effectively be introducing 18 new levels at which tax will be levied? Can the right hon. Gentleman name a single other country with such a complicated system of capital gains tax?

Mr. Darling: On the contrary: the Government are introducing a system that will be much simpler than the present one, because indexation is being phased out. We are ensuring that there is a tapered system, which means that, the longer an asset is held, the less tax is being paid.

I am surprised that Conservative Members are being a trifle critical. Only a week before the Budget, the shadow Chancellor said that he favoured moving to a capital gains tax system that would be based on a tapered system, holding assets for, say, 10 years. If he backed it a week before the Budget, I would be surprised if the Conservative party had changed its position only a few weeks after the Budget.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): The right hon. Gentleman will want to make it clear to the House that, when I made that suggestion, I set two conditions. The first was that it was a genuine simplification that resulted in the end of indexation, and secondly, that, with the end of indexation, the final rate for long-term gains would be 0 per cent. The Chief Secretary's system creates a tax on increases which merely compensate for inflation. It is a wealth tax by the back door. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman has shifted his ground remarkably from his position before the Budget. Before the Budget, he was anxious to make a mark. People were saying that he had not been saying very much. He went into print, and made a speech, which was reported in the *Financial Times*. He made it clear that he wanted to examine scrapping indexation and replacing it with a capital gains tax charge related to the time that an asset had been held. That is precisely what we are doing.

The point of detail that the right hon. Gentleman raises is one for the Standing Committee that will consider the Bill. If he deigns to join it, no doubt we shall hear from him. The principle of introducing a capital gains tax that is based on the time an asset has been held is absolutely right, and is widely supported. Once the indexation system is phased out and we move to a tapered tax, the system will be far simpler, and it will encourage people to hold on to assets in the long term. I am sorry that, once again, the Conservative party is in isolation from the vast majority of people who have welcomed a useful tax reform.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Before we leave capital gains tax and small businesses, has my right hon. Friend received any representations about the interaction of the new tapers and the phasing out of retirement relief? Is he aware that there is a blip, whereby people retiring from

small businesses face a big increase in their capital gains tax bill compared to how it would be if there were a longer phasing out of retirement relief?

Mr. Darling: I have not received representations to that effect, but I am aware that representations have been received in the Treasury. The National Farmers Union in particular has raised that point. When any system is phased out and a new one is introduced, there will inevitably be the blips to which my hon. Friend has referred. That is something that we can look at, but, if the existing regime is extended any further than we propose, it will add to complications in the present system.

We are trying to move to the new system as quickly as possible, consistent with the fact that people have made certain arrangements. The transitional arrangements we have made are fair to the vast majority of people. Most people want us to move to the new, simpler system as quickly as possible.

Mr. Kidney: On a more general point, the pre-Budget report was an excellent consultation process, and the working families tax credit was improved as a result. The consultation on individual savings accounts was excellent and full and resulted in improvements, but there was no consultation on the proposals for capital gains. Some of the difficulties that are now part of the debate might have been ironed out had there been consultation ahead of the Budget.

Mr. Darling: There was no consultation as part of the pre-Budget report, but there was consultation on aspects of the capital gains tax system. As in other tax matters, the Government are happy to listen to representations. The Bill is about to go into Committee, where it will receive extremely lengthy consideration. I do not know whether my hon. Friend hopes to be on it, but if he is, he will have ample time to tell us about capital gains tax and to study each and every dot and comma of the Bill.

I should like to leave capital gains tax—

Sir Peter Tapsell *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman once more, then I want to make progress.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I am most grateful to the Chief Secretary for his courtesy in giving way to me a second time.

Broadly speaking, I very much welcome the general thrust of the capital gains tax proposals. However, the right hon. Gentleman said that people will be encouraged to hold assets long-term because of the 10-year rule. I argue that that is precisely the defect in the arrangements. It will distort economic decisions. One wants people to take economic decisions not because of tax considerations but because of business considerations.

I hope that, in Committee, the right hon. Gentleman will look at the philosophy behind that, because the successful national economies are those in which people move their assets around according to the demands of markets and profitability, and not to take advantage of some tax situation.

Mr. Darling: I understand the conflict to which the hon. Gentleman referred, which will always be present in the tax system to some extent. The system that we propose is far better than the present one, where people with unrealised gains are fearful of realising them because of the comparatively high rate of capital gains tax that will be visited on them. I am sure that he and other hon. Members have come across a number of people who have perhaps invested their money in a business and want to move it on, who may have had their money tied up for many years, but who, being higher-rate taxpayers, face a substantial capital gains tax burden.

The philosophy behind our proposal is absolutely right. This measure, together with other measures we have introduced, will help especially the small and medium-sized sectors of business about which all hon. Members have expressed concern in debates on previous Finance Bills.

I should mention in passing that the Budget introduced a new university challenge fund, a public-private partnership that will provide £50 million in venture capital to help turn good research into good business. That, alongside the capital gains tax reforms, the reforms that will encourage research and development and the measures that will enhance first-year capital allowances, will help to build a productive base in this country.

Encouraging saving is an essential part of our strategy. The Bill introduces the new individual savings accounts, which make it easier for people to save. Extending the savings habit to more people is absolutely essential, given that more than half the population do not save. We now have a savings regime which is sustainable, unlike the previous system, and under which tax relief is fairly distributed.

We are also committed to protecting the environment. Clause 7 increases the road fuel duties in line with our commitment to an annual increase of at least 6 per cent. in real terms to help meet the targets agreed at Kyoto. For that, of course, credit must go to the previous Government, who were committed to increasing those duties by at least 5 per cent. every year. We have done a little more, but the Tories will no doubt welcome our continuation of that policy. Clause 16 reduces vehicle excise duty for lorries and buses that meet low emission standards.

We recognise that car ownership is necessary in many parts of the country, which is why we are consulting on new measures to reduce vehicle excise duty on smaller and more environmentally friendly cars, and encouraging the use of cleaner fuels such as ultra-low-sulphur diesels and road fuel gases.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sorry to intervene again, but representations made to me in my constituency suggest that such diesel, which many people want, is unavailable. I have talked to colleagues in other parts of the country, and they have said the same. Are we going to press industry to ensure that it is made available, and, indeed, that it is stocked on garage forecourts in place of the usual diesel used by cars, rather than at the rear of garages where lorries might fill up?

Mr. Darling: I cannot speak for my hon. Friend's constituency, as it is a year or two since I was there, but I am happy to accept what he says. The Government can do many things, but distributing fuel to garage forecourts is not one of them. However, I hear what my hon. Friend

[Mr. Darling]

says. I hope that such fuels will become more widely available, not just in areas of dense population but in rural areas such as those which comprise part of his constituency.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Swinney *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to my hon. Friend once more, and then to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney); I shall then conclude my remarks.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sorry, but I should like to press my right hon. Friend on another aspect of the problem, which is that four-star leaded fuel is now cheaper than unleaded fuel in many areas. Will he look into that, as it seems remarkable that four-star leaded fuel is often about the cheapest petrol?

Mr. Darling: I have not noticed that at all. In the brief recess last week, I travelled from Edinburgh to Stornoway, and paid particular attention to the various prices, because I knew that I would be speaking in this debate. I am bound to say that four-star petrol appeared to be more expensive than the unleaded petrol on which my car happens to run.

Mr. Swinney: On his way to Stornoway, the Chief Secretary drove through my constituency. He will have noticed that it is a large rural constituency, where car use is absolutely essential. The Treasury is continuing the previous Government's policy on road fuel duties, but has it received any evidence to suggest that increasing the cost of petrol results in a decline in the use of vehicles? I should be interested to find out what evidence the Treasury has considered in that regard.

Mr. Darling: The matter has been looked into. If fuel duties are increased, there is a reduction in car use and lower carbon dioxide emissions. For the sake of completeness, I confirm that I did drive through the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but, as it was the middle of the night and there was a driving snowstorm, I did not see very much of it. However, I congratulate the gritters who were out and about, even though it was 4 o'clock in the morning.

The Budget sets a clear path for this Parliament and beyond. Economic growth will move to a more sustainable level this year. Inflation is set to fall, with a new monetary framework that provides a more credible long-term approach than we have had in the past. Rigorous control of public spending has meant that we have been able to release more money this year for the Government's priorities in health, education and transport. We are increasing investment in London Underground, with a new public-private partnership. We are providing help for rural transport and many other changes. None of that would have happened but for the change of Government a year ago.

The Conservative amendment is in the name of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden—none of his colleagues have put their names to it. He claims that the Bill increases business taxation, but it does not, as it reduces corporation tax for large and small businesses. He claims that it reduces the incentive to save, but the individual savings account will encourage people to save. He has the gall to say that we are increasing the incentive for cross-border shopping in duty-paid goods, yet the Conservative Government were in power for 18 years and did nothing to address that problem.

The amendment claims that we are adding to the complexity of the taxation system, when we are simplifying it. It criticises us for failing to deliver an environmental strategy, when we have a clear environmental strategy to encourage people to use public transport and tax the use of cars and lorries that are environmentally damaging.

Mr. Loughton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Darling: No.

The Conservatives have the impertinence to say that we are threatening to turn a golden economic legacy into a work-to-welfare programme. Many young people who are participating in the new deal are thanking the Government for an opportunity to get into work that they would never have had from the previous Government.

As for the golden economic legacy, that myth was exposed a year ago. The British people saw through what the previous Government had been doing for 18 years. They knew that, far from a golden economic legacy, the previous Government had created despair, and often economic failure rather than success. We have reinforced our commitment to economic stability. We are building a platform to provide for public services on a sustainable basis. We are showing our commitment and determination to modernise the tax and benefits system to make work pay.

The Bill is another step towards fulfilling our manifesto promises of a year ago. We are creating long-term stability, opportunity for the many and not for the few, and a country determined to lift its sights—a new ambition and a modern economy for the 21st century. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.22 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Finance (No. 2) Bill because it increases business taxation, reduces the incentive to save, increases the incentive for cross-border shopping in duty-paid goods, adds to the complexity of the taxation system, fails to deliver an environmental strategy, and threatens to turn a golden economic legacy into a Work to Welfare programme."

As the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said, this is the second Finance Bill of this parliamentary Session. It is worse than the first one and does nothing to repair the damage caused by last summer's Finance Bill. It is also one of the largest Finance Bills ever to come before the House, comprising 400 pages in two not very handy volumes.

It is remarkable that, despite its extraordinary length, the Bill leaves out the centrepiece of the Budget—the welfare-to-work project. The working families tax credit that featured prominently in the Budget statement is not in the Bill. That proves that it is not really a tax credit.

If it were, it would be in the Finance Bill. Instead, it is another benefit that will be administered by the Inland Revenue. That is its only connection so far with the tax system.

There may be another better reason why the welfare-to-work proposals are not in the Finance Bill. Perhaps the Government are still trying to work out exactly how they should operate. In the debate following the Budget, we pointed out that the system will be extraordinarily complex to administer, will impose additional burdens on businesses and will have a large potential cost, which was not reflected in the Budget arithmetic. We also pointed out that there will be a big incentive for everyone to look after everyone else's children, rather than their own. Coupled with the restriction on the married person's allowance, that is a funny way in which to strengthen the family unit.

In a parliamentary answer since the Budget, it emerged that an extra 320,000 families will face a marginal benefit withdrawal—that is, an effective marginal tax rate—of more than 50 per cent. Perhaps a big rethink is going on about the welfare-to-work proposals.

The Bill, minus that central feature, is almost entirely about raising taxes and making them more complicated. This is a tax-raising Finance Bill. That is a breach of the promises made explicitly by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on behalf of the Labour party before the general election. They promised, in terms, that they would not increase taxation, and they have. More important, perhaps, is the way in which they have gone about it, which will do great damage to the economy by hitting businesses and savings.

The welfare-to-work project depends on jobs being created by firms. Governments do not create jobs—they are created by industry, firms, businesses and partnerships. Pushing people off the benefit system is not enough. There needs to be an equivalent pull of new jobs being created. The scheme will fail and will become a work-to-welfare system if the Government persist with their high-taxation strategy. Business taxes are set to rise by nearly £20 billion in this Parliament.

It is not just the extra tax burden itself—it is the complexity that goes with it. After the Finance Bill was published, the *Financial Times* commented on 9 April that

"fundamental parts of the bill do not appear as primary legislation but as outline 'regulations'."

The newspaper quoted the head of tax at KPMG, Mr. Ian Barlow, as saying:

"In corporation tax we are no further forward today than we were yesterday."

He said that regulations were normally used for detail, but that this sort of material should be in primary legislation.

Why does a Bill of this length not contain the detail—or, in some cases, even the main provisions—which companies need to plan their tax affairs? That ought to worry the House, because it means that vital tax matters—which go to the centre of the functions of this House—are being left for enactment by Treasury regulations. Another tax partner—this time from Coopers and Lybrand—commented:

"I think we are getting perilously close to some constitutional issues".

If outsiders are worried about the scrutiny process of this House, hon. Members should be worried, too.

When the Financial Secretary to the Treasury winds up the debate, perhaps she can tell us why a 400-page Bill does not contain important provisions about new and existing taxes, which are to be relegated to subsidiary Treasury regulations that the House has not seen yet.

Apart from the increased yield from corporation tax—which will do its own damage—other business taxes are proposed by the Bill; for example, stamp duty. In his Budget statement, the Chancellor led us to believe that the increase in stamp duty was to be paid only by householders, and rich householders at that. In fact, three quarters of stamp duty is paid by businesses transacting business assets. Again, the Government are hitting the corporate sector, which is emblematic of their entire approach.

Taxes on property transactions are comparatively low, certainly by European standards. That is to our advantage—it is one reason why businesses migrate into this country and why we are an attractive centre for new businesses and investment. So what do the Government do? They spot a soft target and increase stamp duty, eroding our comparative advantage. In Brussels, that advantage is regarded as unfair tax competition, and our competitiveness is threatened by tax harmonisation, which will come about anyway—not because of Brussels, but because of the Bill.

The golden economic legacy—it is noticeable that even the Chief Secretary now refers to it—is turning out to be even more precious than we thought. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) said, all these measures are unnecessary. The Budget deficit has fallen further and faster than we planned, not because of anything that the Government have done, but simply because of the prudent—perhaps over-prudent—approach of the previous Government. Revenues are pouring in and the tax-raising proposals are unnecessary.

That applies not only to stamp duty, but to another proposed business tax that has been mentioned—the tax on diesel. That will be increased by another 12 per cent., which is more than the increase in the tax on petrol. The Freight Transport Association said:

"The disproportionate increase in fuel duty for trucks has no economic or environmental credibility . . . The fuel tax increase will raise industry's transport costs by 2.5 per cent."

The tax will hit industry and distribution when they are already suffering from the high rate of the pound and the erosion of their international competitiveness. It is also inflationary, as all goods and raw materials that have to be transported will incur those higher costs. As it was announced today that the Government have missed their inflation target for the 10th month out of 11, they should be seriously worried about Budget provisions that threaten further to raise inflation.

The tax is not very bright environmentally. The Government are proud of the agreement that was reached at Kyoto in Japan to stabilise or reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, but diesel produces less CO_2, which is the main greenhouse gas, than petrol does. Why, then, is diesel duty rising further and faster than petrol duty? That is completely perverse.

I do not think that the Government have thought about the matter—they are in a muddle, and the Budget's environmental package is something of a non-event. That opinion is not mine alone; it is also the view of the

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

Treasury Select Committee, which, in its report on the Budget, expressed disappointment that the promised environmental Green Book had not appeared. It said:

"The Financial Secretary to the Treasury said in July 1997 that the next"

Red Book

"would be accompanied by a 'Green Book' setting out the environmental implications of government policy, but this did not appear."

That is yet another broken Government promise. When the Financial Secretary responds to the debate, I hope that she will explain why she broke that promise and why the Government are increasing the tax on diesel, which, in terms of global warming, is more benign than alternative fuels.

Mr. Loughton: If, like me, my right hon. Friend blinked when the Chief Secretary was talking about the supposed environmental package in the Budget, he will have missed it. For all the fury from the Deputy Prime Minister before the Budget about a target of 60 per cent. development of brown-field sites, is my right hon. Friend aware of a single measure in the Budget that will have made that target more realisable?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is right: it is all talk and no action. That is certainly the case in the west country as well as in his constituency. All we get is more talk and more reviews. There are to be reviews on water pollution; on a possible aggregates tax; on energy use in industry; and on whether VAT can be reduced on energy-efficient materials. That is all for later; all we get now are tax increases. When the Chancellor hears the word "environment", he reaches for a tax increase.

Take the overall figure for fuel: the Chancellor says that we had a fuel escalator, and we did, but he has increased it and brought it forward. Fuel duties will now be increased by 6 per cent. in real terms. Added to the fact that the Government have brought forward the dates of the increases and made them more frequent, they will raise in this Parliament an extra £9 billion beyond what we planned, from fuel duties alone. That has nothing to do with concern for the environment and everything to do with building up a revenue reserve in the Treasury for spending later.

That does not hit only businesses; it is damaging to ordinary motorists, and especially to those in rural areas who run cars as a necessity, not a luxury. Ministers probably do not fill up their cars now that they are driven around by other people, but for our constituents who have to do so, the increases are a real burden. It is frankly an insult to tell them that in compensation they will be flicked another £50 million over three years for some gimmick on rural bus services. That does not go even a tiny part of the way towards compensating them for the increase in their transport costs.

We are not talking only about petrol. The duty on other fuels, such as heating oil, has gone up by at least 9 per cent. as well. So much for the Government's concern for the old, the poor and the cold in winter.

The central failure in the Government's economic strategy is the taxation on savings, which started in last July's Budget with the £5 billion-a-year raid on pension funds. The Chancellor should at that time have been encouraging and giving additional incentives for savings, instead of which he taxed them. As a direct consequence, the entire strain of controlling inflation was transferred to monetary policy, leading to the five interest rate rises since the Budget.

The rise in interest rates has nothing to do with anything that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe did or did not do before the general election. He met his inflation target of 2.5 per cent. or less by the end of the previous Parliament. The present Government, by taxing savings, have caused the job of controlling inflation to fall entirely to the Monetary Policy Committee at the Bank of England.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Is not it clear that the Chief Secretary does not even believe himself the criticism that he has levelled at my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), that he did not put up interest rates when he should have done before the general election? If the Government had genuinely believed that interest rates were substantially too low, they would have put them up by more than 0.25 per cent. when they came to power; they would have put them up by 1 per cent. or 2 per cent., or whatever they thought the shortfall was at that time.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes an unanswerable point. If it is true that the Government thought that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe should have put up interest rates before then, why did they not compensate for the alleged failing immediately on gaining office? Instead, the Government attacked savings instead of consumption, which led directly to those five interest rate rises, which have now put an immense strain on manufacturing industry and exports, because of the strength of the pound.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's comments about interest rates. Would he like to comment on the fact that during the 18 years that his party was in power, interest rates rose from 5¼ to 17 per cent.? Does he think that that gave our industry stability?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the past few years, industry and Government have enjoyed a golden period of stability, in terms of exchange rates, interest rates and taxation, so we need take no lectures from the hon. Gentleman on that. We are debating what has happened since the general election; that legacy has been put at risk by a misplaced macro-economic tactic of taxing businesses and savings instead of anything else.

Mr. Darling: I, too, am interested in listening to the right hon. Gentleman, who says that we should have been taxing consumption. Which taxes on consumption would he have increased?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. I did not say that we should be taxing consumption. If he had not taxed savings, of necessity he would not have been in the position that he is in now, because, in macro-economic terms, savings are an alternative to taxation—they neutralise expenditure and consumption. Instead of attacking savings, he should have

provided additional incentives. That would have been an alternative strategy, and it was one that we were pursuing by the time that we left office.

The point before us now is that those errors and mistakes, which are clear and beyond dispute to outside commentators, go uncorrected in the Finance Bill. Piled on top of the £5 billion-a-year raid on pension funds we now have the botched introduction of individual savings accounts to replace personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts. If the Chancellor had wanted to reform those savings systems and vehicles, he could have done so. Instead, he was determined to have an entirely different system with a new name, so he has transferred all the costs and the organisational expense to the savings industry and savers by setting up a new instrument that is more expensive and less generous.

An annual limit of £10,800 of savings under TESSAs and PEPs will be reduced to £5,000, and the tax credit that goes to savers will be cut from 20 per cent. to 10 per cent. and then abolished altogether. After that abolition, there will be no advantage in saving through ISAs at all for any but higher-rate taxpayers. Therefore, where the Government get their 6 million extra low-income savers from no one knows. In addition, the expense of setting up the new accounts is entirely uncompensated for by the Government.

We welcome the Government's U-turn on some of their earlier intentions, but the damage has already been done, because everyone now knows what the Government really want to do. The message is, if one has a pension, the Government will tax the pension fund and, if one saves, the Government may well try to change the rules and restrict the benefit. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the Red Book the savings ratio is predicted to fall during the next few years.

On top of that, we have a new system of capital gains tax. Again, the Treasury Select Committee was scathing about it and observed:

> "We regret that the capital gains tax proposals were not included in the Pre-Budget Report; we recommend that the Treasury should give urgent attention to reducing the complexity of the new system of tapers."

It is unusual and a great mistake to introduce a tax reform of such size and complexity without proper consultation, which is not simply saying to people, "Tell us what your ideas are for the reform of capital gains tax." With every other large-scale reform of the tax system, the Government have published proposals and invited outside commentators, practitioners and taxpayers to comment before draft legislation was put before the House. As the Treasury Select Committee stated, that is not what they have done in this case.

The result is that we have a gigantic mistake on our hands—a capital gains tax system that is bafflingly complex. By some calculations, there will be 34 different rates, which will be expensive for taxpayers and for the Inland Revenue to administer. That will encourage people to lock into unsatisfactory investments for long periods, which is the opposite of what is required in a flexible, dynamic economy, when investments should flow and be diverted to places where they are needed at short notice. If inflation increases above the Government's predictions, we shall return to the situation where we are taxing inflationary gains all over again. It is a bad reform and we will amend it in Committee.

On the indirect taxes, the tax on casinos has been unnecessarily and dramatically increased. No consultation took place and the increase will hit foreign earnings, investment and employment—all things that the Government may need rather more in the years ahead. According to the Red Book, the balance of payments deficit is set to widen, so the Government will be looking for more foreign earnings, not fewer. It also predicts a decline in business investment in the years ahead, and the labour market could easily turn down later this year. Why tax an industry that brings in foreign earnings and has high investment and employment?

The other excise duties, on tobacco and alcohol, were all put up by more than we planned when we left office, and in the face of a growing problem of smuggling and cross-border shopping. In the pre-Budget report in November, the Government announced that Customs and Excise would review smuggling and fraud, which was done by the end of last year, but the findings have not been published. Inquiries as to the reason have simply met with the statement that the findings are confidential. So much for the White Paper, "Your Right to Know". According to the Government, we have no right to know about an important matter of public concern—fraud and smuggling.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not want to mislead the House. What has been said about the review is that the personnel implications mean that it must be considered within the comprehensive spending review, and an announcement will be made. As he well knows as a former Minister, when Government documents are being worked on before publication, they are processed in that way. He has not been told what he has just told the House.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All that is very interesting, but why was it not put in the answer to my written question? I asked the hon. Lady when the findings would be published, but she did not refer to that subject at all, and simply said that there would be a review of personnel in due course. She did not even promise that the report would be published at that time, yet meanwhile the Government published a White Paper called, "Your Right to Know".

One thing is clear: we have no right to know what Customs and Excise has done on that issue, and the Government are making a bad situation worse, by raising those duties and increasing the differential between prices in the United Kingdom and those on the continent, and the incentive to shop abroad and to smuggle. I hope that when the hon. Lady replies to the debate, she will be able to give us an idea of whether and by how much smuggling and fraud are getting worse and being made worse as a result of the Budget proposals.

This Bill is built on the faulty premise that one can build a strong economy by raising business taxes and make people more self-reliant by taxing their savings. Despite the imminent large Budget surplus, the Chancellor is asking the House to pass higher, more damaging and more complex taxes. The Opposition will oppose them.

4.49 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) talked about a golden economic legacy. The only definition I can think of for that golden economic legacy is the absence of crisis. Each time a Conservative Government have departed and a Labour Government taken over, there has been a crisis. In 1974 there was a crisis, and when I entered the House in 1964 there was a crisis. If that is his new definition of a golden economic legacy, he is entitled to it, but when eventually my Government are replaced, they will leave a legacy rather better than those we got when taking over from previous Conservative Administrations.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheldon: I have only just started. I want to deal with some of the most important problems that we face.

I wish to highlight the balance of trade and the level of the pound. The complaints of manufacturing industry have been well documented. We have heard some today, and I am sure that we shall hear more. Exporters are frequently quoted, and their difficulties have been described in detail. We hear less about the consequences of the high pound for imports. I must declare an interest. I started my own company long before I came into this House, and I retain an interest in it. It is a manufacturer of household textiles and imports both raw materials and semi-manufactures as well as exporting manufactures.

Stability, particularly of prices, is important to all companies and is our watchword in dealing with our economic problems, as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said. However, stability is needed in exchange rates, too. That is one of our major problems. A high pound brought many overseas exporters to establish a foothold in the United Kingdom market in the past and I think that that will happen again. The competition from imports made cheap by the 30 per cent. over-valuation of the pound has long-term effects. That is the real danger. Overseas suppliers are given a free incentive to compete for jobs and market share in this country. The greatest danger of the high pound is not just the loss of exports and the increase in imports but the fact that it allows longer-term adjustments. That may be taking place now.

The Red Book gives a range of 3¼ to 3½ per cent. for the increase in exports in 1998 over 1997, and 7½ to 8 per cent. for the increase in imports. We often hear about the problems of our exporters, but we do not hear so much about British manufacturers who are suffering from increased competition from imports and who will suffer from growing competition. We have learned this lesson in the past. Once importers get a hold in this market, they are reluctant to let go. They make considerable expenditures and once they have the market, they hold on. That happened with the motor car and white goods industries. It will happen again, but, I hope, to a more limited extent. The questions posed by the high pound are whether companies will pull out of an overseas market and whether overseas suppliers will find attractions in moving into the United Kingdom market. Once such longer-term decisions are taken, they are hard to reverse. That is the penalty that we may be paying. What we can do about it?

First, the Budget and the Finance Bill must be produced with the decisions, and anticipated decisions, of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England very much in mind. If the Chancellor wants lower interest rates and a lower pound, there are certain actions that he can take. The Treasury Select Committee's excellent fourth report—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice)—put it well. Among the ways in which the Chancellor could achieve those objectives are raising taxation on consumption and increasing savings markedly. That would have an effect on the Monetary Policy Committee and could have an effect on reducing interest rates.

The freedom to operate the levers of economic policy that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor may require has always been limited by international considerations. That is a factor to which we are well used. Now that the Bank of England is responsible for setting interest rates, that limited freedom is more circumscribed, but that does not mean that it does not exist. Quite apart from his decisions on taxation and savings, he still has certain powers that he could yet use. If he wished, he could invoke his authority and alter the inflation rate target. He is unlikely to use that power, for very good reasons. If he were ever to use it, it would have to be with great circumspection.

Much more reasonably, the Chancellor could make use of the prescription offered by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary when she reminded the House that the instructions given to the Bank of England were

"'to maintain price stability and, subject to that, to support the . . . economic policy'

of Her Majesty's Government,

'including its objectives for growth and employment.'"—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 801.]

Maintaining sustainable growth is one of the criteria that the Bank must take into account. She went on to describe the mix of elements that make up macro-economic policy.

We all know that the fundamental aim of the Monetary Policy Committee is to achieve a set level of inflation and abide by it, but that is not the only thing that it has to consider. If it were convinced of the need to increase interest rates to maintain the inflation target, under the agreement, price stability and particularly the goal of 2.5 per cent. inflation would be decisive. There is no question about that; that is the instruction to it. However, the situation is not, and frequently cannot be, quite so clear. Under such circumstances, the mix of elements that make up macro-economic policy, and the other objectives of growth and employment, come to occupy an important position.

The Monetary Policy Committee is divided four-four, with a casting vote required. Alan Greenspan never had to face anything like that. That is a sign, if any were required, of the uncertainty about price stability. The criteria not just of inflation, but of growth and employment, come to occupy a rather more important position. When there is uncertainty, the Chancellor must use his greater knowledge of those other matters. He is then—perhaps only then—in a strong position to remind the committee of the importance of the other objectives of growth and employment in respect of which the level of the pound should play a crucial role in its considerations.

We do not know what pressures the Chancellor may be putting on the Governor. Such matters are naturally confidential. In my time, there were frequent meetings

between the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They were generally conducted with good sense and reason, and I assume that the same sort of thing happens today. It would be surprising if the Chancellor did not make his view known to the Governor, particularly in the context of such division in the committee. I hope that that is taking place at present.

We have to compare the need for stability in prices with the need for stability in exchange rates. There is an advantage in stability in both. One cannot say that stability in prices is the end of all our economic problems. There are many other areas in which stability is important. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to press for price stability, but we need stability in exchange rates, too.

We need stability because, whereas at one time one could operate in the foreign exchange markets and hedge, it is not so easy to do so now. Although the markets are much more complex and can provide the answers, it is industry that does not provide the answers. We have an international trading situation that is much more like the home trade now. People buy and sell on a continuing basis, not just on a batch basis. In those circumstances, it is much more difficult today to know exactly what will happen a few months ahead and engage in hedging.

The Government obviously have to be concerned with manufacturing industry. Manufacturing industry has been suffering, whereas services have been doing well until fairly recently. I am very conscious of the importance of manufacturing industry, because my constituency suffered greatly between 1979 and 1981, when I lost 30 per cent. of the firms in my constituency. It was a massive tragedy, caused by the $2.40 pound and 17 per cent. interest rates. They were good firms—firms such as exist in every country. Successful countries have all those kinds of firms. The question that we have to ask ourselves is how we deal with the value of the pound and the possibility that the euro will play a rather more important role than people have perhaps anticipated.

I wish that economic and monetary union had not gone ahead, but it is there. I am increasingly finding it pointless to argue about whether it will be a success. It is happening, and we have to realise that. We have to face the reality. I know that we are not very good at facing reality, but this is one of the realities that we have to face. Although I wish that EMU had not happened, we have to adjust to that reality.

Not only is EMU happening, but it will be successful in the only way in which it can be. It is going to survive. That is one criterion for its success. We may not like it, but it is going to be there. Too many interests are involved for it to fail. Of course there will be fudge, more fudge, still more fudge and yet more fudge. We know all that. There will be fudge over the principles, but its survival is assured. We have to adjust to that survival. If we wish, we can make our stand on principle. Good luck to those who want to do that, but it would have been better by far to have joined. At any rate, we should now announce our intention to join at some stage, so that we have some effect on the changes that will be made.

It would have been better by far to have been able to influence the most important decisions. The most important decisions are taken at the beginning of the life of an institution. We shall largely be excluded from them, but if we state our intention to join, we shall have some involvement in the important discussions that lie ahead. An announcement of our intention to join EMU would also have an effect on interest rates and, therefore, on the value of the pound.

That is about all that I have to say. I am impressed with the decision on child benefit. It is a move in the right direction. I note that our economic policy is a cautious one. That is not a bad way for a new Government to commence our economic management, but as confidence in the operation of our economy grows, I look forward to wider initiatives.

5.3 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I shall make detailed comments about some clauses in a moment, but I want to start by making some more general points about the Budget, especially in the context of the Treasury Committee report, which has been referred to and which was published yesterday.

As hon. Members may know, I do not support the report and have produced an alternative. I regret the need to do so and it is not something that I have done lightly. I have been accused by some of using the report to make party political capital. They should bear it in mind that I have been a member of the Committee for three years and, in that time, including the run-up to the general election, I saw no need to issue a minority report and did not do so.

I issued a minority report yesterday because I felt that the majority report was not up to the high, constructively critical standards of previous reports. I made it clear to my colleagues on the Committee that I was unhappy with what they were doing.

There is much in the Budget that I and my colleagues welcome. The reformed individual savings account proposals are an improvement and a justification for the new consultative pre-Budget report and the process that goes with it, which the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), who is also a member of the Select Committee, has mentioned. I would, however, like to issue one caution: I hope that in future Ministers will not use the pre-Budget statement as an excuse for a mini-Budget, because that would obscure its fundamental purpose.

The code for fiscal stability is welcome, as are the reforms to the structure of national insurance contributions. Those are real changes, which I welcome and we shall support, but it is not the job of the Select Committee or Members of Parliament simply to be cheerleaders for the good policies; we have a responsibility to provide constructive and rigorous scrutiny of the more controversial and questionable parts of the Budget, and of errors and omissions in the Budget process.

There should have been proper scrutiny of the public spending plans in relation to the Budget, including evidence from the Chief Secretary. It is nonsense to argue that there is nothing to scrutinise, which is the Government's line. There is a new set of spending figures for 1998-99, even if they are very similar to the Conservative plans. Precisely that issue should be examined. Questions have to be asked. Will the new money for education and health be enough? What explains the revisions to the estimates of the reserve? How will the tax credits be accounted for—a matter that the

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

Conservative spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), has also raised and has not been dealt with? Why have the Government broken their promise to keep to the 1998–99 control total?

Why is there not the usual spending information in the Red Book, including the tables of real public expenditure? The Red Book does not stand alone; it can be made sense of only by looking back over previous Red Books. Why? What factors are framing the Government's plans for their future spending policies? I have tried to promote debate on that, but the Government have been reluctant to enter into it. I believe that we should be asking such questions.

I am worried that there is little scrutiny of the Government's plans to deal with the millennium computer problem in the public sector. It has major expenditure implications that need to be considered carefully. By the by, the last time I spoke in the House on the matter was when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made a statement that the Government had the matter under control and that it would cost about £350 million. He then admitted that that was not the total Government expenditure and that the Liberal Democrats had done a calculation of £1 billion, which he thought was about right.

We revised our figure at Christmas time. A few weeks after Christmas, the Prime Minister said that he thought that the cost would be about £3 billion, which ironically was exactly the same as the Liberal Democrats' revised figure. So is it the Liberal Democrats who are working out the cost to the Government or do the Government have their own costs? If they do, should we not have an assessment of what the cost of dealing with the problem will mean to the public finances and to Government Departments? Unfortunately, the Select Committee report ignored that. No report should ignore such serious factors.

The other problem with the Select Committee report is that it has rather fudged the issue of fiscal policy. The Chief Secretary said that there had been a tightening of fiscal policy, but this is an ex post situation and most of it has had little impact on cooling consumer demand. The tightening has come not so much from a conscious act of government as from higher nominal revenues because of higher inflation and the extra taxes the Government have introduced, not on consumers, but on businesses and savers. No one can pretend that the effects in the short term of such a fiscal tightening are the same as a tightening directed against consumer demand; it does not have the same rebalancing effect. The Confederation of British Industry's comment on the Budget is that:

> "It remains our view that had last year's fiscal tightening been more immediate and obvious in its effects on the consumer, rather than focusing on investors, the interest rate dilemma now facing the Bank of England would be less acute."

That missed opportunity helps to explain the strength of the pound and the unbalanced nature of the economy, which is the biggest threat to continuing recovery.

We need a great deal of scrutiny of the new tax credit policies. There is no question but that those policies will help some people in low-paid work, but there is a question as to whether employment as a whole will benefit. There are a host of issues relating to fraud and cost-benefit analyses of each of the credits that need to be monitored. That is why I am concerned that the amounts of tax credit should not ultimately be hidden away as merely a reduction in the tax take, but should appear explicitly, with a periodic review of the effects on employment, the additional expenditure involved and the losses through fraud. It is the Government's flagship policy, yet they have not explained any of those matters, nor have they been effectively challenged to do so.

The Budget was weak in respect of the environment. The promise made in the House on 10 July last year by the Financial Secretary—to provide a Green Book to complement the Red Book—has simply been broken, which reflects the Government's giving a lower priority to environmental issues. We have not yet seen the policies that are needed if the Government's manifesto pledge of a 20 per cent. cut in carbon dioxide emissions is to be met. Frankly, there is growing concern that the Government are backsliding on that pledge and it was of specific concern that the Budget referred to an 8 per cent. target, rather than one of 20 per cent. I hope that we will be given clear assurances on that point.

I shall now address some of the clauses with which we shall deal in the early stages of our consideration of the Bill. The Government's new proposals on capital gains tax—which give us cause for concern—have been mentioned. We do not share the view that it is necessarily economically sensible to restructure capital gains tax in the manner proposed or that artificial incentives should be offered to encourage longer-term asset allocation decisions. As has been said, that can lead to inefficiencies and to abuse of some of the claimed benefits.

The changes to capital gains tax have been widely criticised. The Chief Secretary implied that they had been overwhelmingly welcomed, but they have been criticised by the tax profession generally and by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The only complimentary comment that I have heard was made by an accountant who told me that the additional complication would substantially raise his fee income. It is always worrying when accountants make the biggest gain from tax changes. The Government should consider constructively amendments to their proposals, given that they have not consulted publicly on them. The Government did consult on and were sensible enough to listen to advice in respect of individual savings accounts and were commended for doing so by all parties in the House and by people outside. It is an example that they should follow and I hope that, on the issue of capital gains tax, they might show similar flexibility.

We also oppose the fuel duty rise. If there is to be confidence in and public support for a large environmental tax shift, it must be seen to be a shift and not a smash-and-grab raid on motorists; yet that was what drove the previous Government and how the policy continues to be operated by the current Government. The Liberal Democrat policy of increasing fuel duties has always been clearly balanced by a commitment to use the revenues to reduce vehicle excise duty on fuel-efficient cars to a nominal £10 per year. Shifting the tax off ownership and on to use makes good economic sense. I welcome the Government's commitment to consider making such changes in future Budgets, but they should acknowledge that they got the balance all wrong in this Budget. There is no offsetting benefit—the change is simply a tax hike dressed up as a green tax.

On clause 25, it is still argued that the rate of income tax should have risen by 1p in the pound to fund specific education investments. The need for greater investment in

education is underlined by the Treasury's confirmation that education spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has already declined under the Labour Government, from 4.7 per cent. to 4.5 per cent., which directly contradicts the Prime Minister's pledge that it would increase as a share of GDP year on year. We should be told why it has declined and how the Government intend to redress the situation.

On clause 30, we are concerned by the continuing adverse impact on business cash flow of the advance corporation tax changes. On clause 152, I shall probe later the issue of auditing Budget assumptions. To me, it is clearly not for the Treasury to specify which assumptions should or should not be audited; that is a role in which the Treasury Committee should have a clear responsibility. It is not for the Chancellor to write his own script as to which aspects of policy he wishes to have monitored. That matter should be determined objectively by those who have to comment on the policy and on developments in it.

I hope that the Government will address those points and that, in future, we shall be able to create a regime in which what the Government do is set down clearly in advance and monitored objectively and that the Government can be held effectively to account. They are a powerful Government with a large majority. That tends to breed arrogance—the Government certainly do not take kindly to criticism—but Governments need effective and constructive criticism if they are to do their job well and policy mistakes are to be avoided. The Select Committees of the House have an important role to play and it is a matter of regret to me that, on this occasion, the Treasury Committee has fallen short of what it could and should have done and of what I hope it will do in future.

Opposition Members, whether in the House or in Select Committees, should avoid either synthetic opposition—I would dispute accusations that anything in my alternative report is calculated in that fashion—or undue sycophancy. The reality is that the Government need to be held effectively to account by the House and we intend to ensure that they are made properly accountable and required to explain their actions and future intentions. We are determined to ensure that the Government's economic policy is subjected to proper scrutiny.

5.16 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I am a newcomer to the Treasury Committee, so I was grateful to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) for explaining the reason for the lateness of his report. In my innocence, I had thought that it was late because he could not deliver it in time for the deliberative meeting of the Select Committee.

I am pleased to support the Bill. It gives effect to many of the good things that were announced in this year's Budget, welcome examples being promotion of enterprise and jobs and support for families, including children—and I was pleased to hear the earlier welcome for the increase in child benefit announced in the Budget. I especially support three processes that were either started or continued in the Budget and which are worthy of our support.

The first is the process of openness and consultation throughout the Budget process. No longer is there to be the secrecy of the—understandable—purdah of Treasury Ministers, with representations going into the black hole and announcements made with great glitz on Budget day. Instead, there was a pre-Budget report made available to the public, interested parties and hon. Members, so that they could contribute before Budget day. There was consultation on individual savings accounts, which greatly improved them prior to the launch. We should all welcome those changes and I hope that the Treasury Committee will be involved in the consultation process in future years, because it is an extremely desirable process.

The second process that I applaud is the intention to make work pay. Last year, very early in their term of office, the Government acted on their intention to make work pay by introducing the windfall tax and the welfare-to-work programme. Many people said: "The windfall tax is a one-off tax; what happens when the money runs out?" The Government are thinking long term, even in the process of getting people into jobs, and planning ahead, as is evidenced by the working families tax credit and the new child care tax credit—excellent inventions.

To the criticism that high marginal tax rates for people on benefits are a disincentive to work, I say that it was ever thus. In 18 years of Tory government we had shameful marginal tax rates in excess of 100 per cent. for people receiving family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Where was the sense of urgency to remove that shameful disincentive for people on benefit to return to work? Where now is the welcome from the official Opposition of a Government who have abolished marginal tax rates in excess of 100 per cent., and who have greatly reduced the number of people who have a marginal tax rate of more than 70 per cent.? The Opposition have had to reach down to a marginal tax rate of 50 per cent. to find an increase in the number of people suffering from what is colloquially called the poverty trap.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Following the example that the hon. Gentleman cited—of someone on family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit—does he accept that the new combined marginal rate is probably 96 per cent.? Does he really think that that makes any difference?

Mr. Kidney: I shall answer in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

To reduce the number of people on those marginal tax rates, it is vital to tackle not only the working families tax credit—to which the Budget illustrations relate—but those other contributions to the disincentive, of which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) reminds me: housing benefit and council tax benefit.

If the hon. Member for Northavon has read the notes of evidence given at meetings of the Treasury Committee, he will see that I pressed the Chancellor of the Exchequer on why the present review of housing benefit and council tax benefit could not have been completed in time for his Budget announcement. Having since met officials from the Department of Social Security, I understand why the Government were not ready with that announcement then. However, it is important, as the hon. Gentleman said, for a marker to be put down for the reform of housing benefit and council tax benefit to be completed soon, to remove all aspects of the disincentive for those on benefit to get into work.

The third process that I welcome as part of the Budget process is the new openness on stability and prudence, with the publication of the code for fiscal stability.

[Mr. Kidney]

How welcome it is that the Chancellor positively invites the Treasury Committee to help in the assessment and monitoring of the Government's performance against the code for fiscal stability. How much more confident and open could the new Labour Government be in managing the economy?

All those are very positive things. I hope that the Chief Secretary will forgive me if I move on to the capital gains tax reforms, the issue that most interests me in the Bill. I believe that the Government have not got the reforms right. As the hon. Member for Gordon said, outside the Chamber there is widespread criticism of them.

Briefly, the reforms are as follows. For capital gains by individuals, not companies, there is to be an end of the indexation system—the taking out of the gain that is attributable only to inflation. Instead, a 10-year tapering scheme is to be introduced. The retirement exemption is to be phased out and a distinction is to be drawn between business and non-business assets.

Interestingly, by contrast, capital gains by companies are dealt with separately, through corporation tax. As part of the Budget process, the Chancellor announced a review of the taxation of companies' capital gains—to be followed, this summer, by consultation about the review.

The tapers for individuals' capital gains differ according to whether the asset is a business or non-business asset. For a business asset, the rate for a gain would be 100 per cent. in year one but only 25 per cent by year 10. A higher-rate taxpayer, holding an asset for 10 full years to benefit from the 25 per cent. taper, would pay an effective rate of only 10 per cent. instead of 40 per cent. For non-business assets, the taper is much less steep, only reducing from 100 per cent. in year one to 60 per cent. in year 10, giving a higher-rate taxpayer an effective tax rate of 24 per cent. only.

All those changes are welcome. As the Chief Secretary said, the differentiation of business and non-business assets is meant to encourage the longer-term holding of assets by businesses. Before the Budget, the business community and the Confederation of British Industry strongly advocated that approach. In a representation to the Government, they argued that encouragement should be given through the tax system.

It is forecast that capital gains tax receipts for the whole of next year will be £2.2 billion—about the equivalent of 1p on the standard rate of income tax. The change from the indexation system to the taper system is cost neutral; it does not affect the forecast.

I do not know how many hon. Members have read their CBI briefing for today's debate; it discusses capital gains tax. The CBI's criticism is noticeably more restrained than the criticism that, according to the hon. Member for Gordon, has been received from other quarters. That is very likely, because the CBI urged the Government to change the system to encourage long-term holding of business assets. However, the briefing contains several very constructive arguments, which I urge the Government to consider in the light of, possibly, making changes in Committee.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that capital gains tax is already the most complicated of all taxes to administer; that the Budget measures will make it even more complicated; and that cost compliance of capital gains tax to the ratio of tax gained is the highest of any tax and will be higher still when the changes are made?

Mr. Kidney: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my next point. I do not welcome a complicated system, but he is right to say that the present system is complicated. At the moment, we appear to be replacing one complicated system with another. How do we progress to the least complicated system? My answer is that we publish our proposals for widespread consultation and hope that we emerge with a better tax proposal as a result of the consultation process.

As the Treasury Committee's report said, that change to the tax regime was not in the pre-Budget report. It seems odd that it has been announced that the system of corporate capital gains will be subject to review, and therefore consultation, but the capital gains system for individuals will not. It seems odd that the changes are cost neutral—which implies that there is no need to rush the changes and introduce them earlier.

It seems odd that there is no public debate about the removal of the inflation element before it is removed. I could easily respond—supporting the Government, as is my instinct—that because we now have stability and, consequently, long-term low inflation, we need no longer worry about taking inflation into account.

As the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) just said, the system of tapers is complex, with different systems for business and non-business assets. There are tests to determine whether an asset is a business asset, and whether an asset is an individual's or a company's asset. All that is complex indeed.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there has been absolutely no simplification of the change? The complexity of the crucial test that he mentioned—to decide whether an asset is a business or non-business asset and, at the time of disposal, whether associated with retirement—will be compounded by the new tax rules.

Mr. Kidney: I accepted with great pleasure my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's assurance that, in Committee, the Government will be responsible and listen to the case for changes that would improve the proposals.

That brings me to my final point about how consultation might improve the system. It relates to whether there should be a nil rate at the end of the taper for people who hold assets for a long time and the effect that the present system has on business people who are about to retire.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary was shrewd, not having heard the representation himself, to guess that, when I asked about representations about businesses where people are due to retire and affected by the interaction of the new system for tapers and the phasing out of the retirement relief, I was talking about farmers.

To make the obvious political point, farmers have had a dreadful time in recent years. No doubt, in due course, we shall see to what extent the previous Government were responsible for that, but this is a bad time for farmers to be faced with another problem, on this occasion with regard to planning their retirement.

One of the points made by the CBI in its briefing is that some businesses may favour early retirement to ensure that the full retirement relief is received now rather than risk the period of phasing out when, because of the blip I mentioned earlier, people will pay a higher tax than they would otherwise have done. I hasten to add that that applies to small businesses, not large ones.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Does he agree that the new rules will have a serious distorting effect in the agriculture industry and, far from bringing down the average age of the entrepreneurs—the farmers—who run those businesses, they will encourage people who should retire to hang on until the end of the 10-year taper so that they obtain the maximum capital gains tax relief once retirement relief has been abolished?

Mr. Kidney: No, I do not agree. The last thing I said was that some people will retire earlier than they had intended if the planned changes go through in their present form.

Consultation would improve the capital gains system proposed in the Bill. Because consultation has not yet taken place I suspect that the work in Committee will be harder than it might have been. We might even have to come back to the matter later.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcote-Amory) said that there would be great opposition to the Bill in Committee. I caution him by referring to just one sentence in the CBI's briefing, which says:

"Entrepreneurs with substantial gains on business assets should benefit, with the steep downward taper offsetting the phasing out of retirement relief and abolition of indexation in most—though by no means all—circumstances."

I caution Opposition Members to beware throwing out the baby with the bath water.

5.32 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I have been becoming increasingly depressed about Britain's economic prospects since last year's Budget, and my pessimism has been greatly exacerbated by what we have heard this afternoon. The Government are not so much confused yet honestly thrashing around for solutions, which would be something, as arrogantly cocooned from reality; they are willing prisoners of their own illusions.

That is no hyperbole. I noted down a number of extraordinary remarks made by the Chief Secretary this afternoon, and I am sure that *Hansard* will show that I did not note them down wrongly. For example, the Chief Secretary spoke about the prospective abolition of advance corporation tax and the abolition of the dividend tax credit, and referred to those changes as "removing distortions from the tax system". Those changes do precisely the opposite.

First, the changes introduced into Britain's corporate tax system the biggest distortion of all, which is double taxation. Henceforth, company shareholders will pay two lots of tax. They will pay corporation tax within the corporate vehicle and they will then pay income tax on the dividends that they receive on which they will have no relief. Therefore, double taxation has now been introduced. If that is not a distortion, I do not know what is.

Matters are made worse by the fact that the effect of that is to tax distributed profits at a higher effective rate than retained profits. That is a double and an extremely dangerous distortion because it reduces the mobility of capital in the economy. It encourages companies to hoard profits. It creates an artificial incentive for them to diversify unduly—to search around desperately looking for some way to invest money within the company or to take over other companies—rather than saying that, if they can no longer make their threshold rate of return on their current range of activities, it would be a good idea to pass the money back to their shareholders so that, through the mechanism of the financial markets, that money can be recycled to other parts of the economy where there may be a demand for it and where it can be used to greater effect.

A double distortion has thus been introduced into the economy by this ill-considered measure. But what is worse is that the Government do not seem to realise what they have done. They seem to believe that, rather than creating a distortion, they have eliminated one.

The Chief Secretary this afternoon referred to the company tax changes as "reducing the corporation tax burden". When I heard him say that across the Floor of the House—not, apparently, as a joke, or even as a sick joke, but as a statement of fact that he appeared to believe—I thought that this was a most extraordinary day. What he is actually doing is what a dishonest loan shark does when he tells some poor little old lady that he can refinance her borrowings at a cheaper rate: the apparent nominal interest rate is lower, but there is a far greater cost to the loan because all the cost is loaded into the front-end charges. That is exactly the kind of statement that the Chief Secretary made this afternoon when he said that his measures reduced the corporation tax burden. I am sure that I wrote down his words correctly. In fact, the measures do nothing of the kind; they do exactly the reverse.

The Chief Secretary need only turn to page 152 of the Red Book, where Treasury officials have calculated for him the exact net impact of his changes in the corporation tax regime. On the one hand, he has slightly reduced the rate of corporation tax; on the other, he has introduced a new system of quarterly payments of corporation tax. That will fall heavily on companies. There is such a thing as a time value of money. I imagine that the Chief Secretary has heard of the time value of money. If money has to be paid out earlier rather than later, a cost is involved. The Treasury officials have calculated the net position. They have calculated the additional burden on companies of paying corporation tax on a new quarterly basis, on an advanced basis—the whole of corporation tax, not just the old ACT on an advanced basis—set off against the reduction in the nominal rates of corporation tax.

The facts are there in black and white on page 152 of the Red Book. In the next financial year, the first full year of the new regime, 1999-2000, the net return to the Treasury from the new measures—the net cost to business—is £1.6 billion. In the following financial year it is £2 billion. So much for reducing the corporation tax burden. It has not been reduced but increased. There can be no marks either for deceiving the House or for deceiving oneself on that important point.

The Chief Secretary also said that he had done nothing to reduce the incentive to save. I give him full credit for not doing some of the unbelievably stupid things that were

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

proposed in the Government's consultation document with regard to PEPs and TESSAs. I am glad that, as a result of the outcry in the House and the pressure from the public at large, the Government were led to think again on that one.

The Chief Secretary has not reduced the incentive to save as much as he might have done if he had gone ahead with his original ideas—I give him that—but one does not have to be an arithmetical genius to work out that he has still reduced it. Any citizen or taxpayer will be able to put a maximum of £5,000 a year into the new individual savings accounts. The PEPs regime, which is still in force, allows a taxpayer to put in £9,000, and he can also have a TESSA. The scope for tax-sheltered savings has been more than halved, which can hardly be described as not reducing the incentive to save.

The fact that the reduction is not as great as it might have been had other, particularly ill-conceived, proposals been implemented does not mean that there has been no reduction in the incentive to save through the tax system: there has been a material reduction. Irrespective of whether it is a good idea to reduce the incentive to save, we should not deceive ourselves, and the Chief Secretary should not be in the business of deceiving the House, about such an essential point. That is what depresses me.

People in an aircraft would be concerned if they were in a storm or if the pilot momentarily lost his way, but they would have greater grounds for concern if it was clear that he was deceiving himself into thinking that he was not in a storm or had not lost his way. That is the position in which this country unfortunately finds itself: the Government are not only doing stupid things but do not even acknowledge what they are doing. They do not even appear to have read what is in the Red Book, which the Treasury itself publishes.

The worst aspect of fiscal policy in the past year has been that the Government made an initial but fundamental economic error on coming to power. I drew attention to it at the time, and drew the Chancellor's attention to it when he appeared before the Treasury Committee. Many of my colleagues have drawn his attention to it since, and we go on doing so. Rarely have predictions been so rapidly, so unfortunately and so fully fulfilled as those which we have made on this matter.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) holds a position of great distinction, not only because of his long service in the House and in government, but because he is a business man, as he reminded hon. Members. He spoke about the great difficulties that manufacturing industry faces. They are entirely gratuitous.

I clearly remember telling the Chancellor last July that, if he did not take fiscal measures to bring about the necessary dampening in demand through a reduction in consumption spending, either investment spending would have to be reduced or the internationally traded sector would bear the burden. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne described what has happened over the past few months—imports have risen and exports have fallen—and correctly drew the attention of hon. Members to what the Red Book says on the subject. Treasury officials have taken that into account in their predictions. Last summer, the Government embarked on a course that led inexorably to the problems from which we are now suffering.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Given the significant fiscal tightening in the past two Budgets, which most economic experts support, what additional fiscal measures does the hon. Gentleman advocate?

Mr. Davies: I am glad that the hon. Lady asks that question because of the rhetorical advantage that I may enjoy in the debate, but I am not glad for the interests of this country. She is under the same illusion as Treasury Ministers, and her comment allows me to deal with the misuse of the word "tightening". I am grateful to her for conveniently bringing me to the worst of the many illusions that the Chief Secretary is under—his complete misunderstanding of the concept of tightening. He congratulated himself because the Government have achieved a fiscal tightening of 2 per cent., but he does not seem to understand that whether that tightening—a reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement—is achieved through a reduction in expenditure or through an increase in particular taxes makes all the difference to demand management.

I must tell the hon. Lady, if she is seriously interested in the answer to her question, that if, for example, the Government spent £1 billion more on social security benefits, almost all the money would go into consumption because people in receipt of benefits have a high propensity to consume and a low or even negative propensity to save. On the other hand, the impact on demand would be less if the Government reduced the higher rate of income tax, because the beneficiaries have a slightly lower propensity to consume and a higher propensity to save. Money would go to people with a very high propensity to save or a low propensity to consume if the Government decided to redeem a gilt issue prematurely, which would have a low impact on increasing demand.

Those measures would all have some effect on increasing demand, but if the Government taxed savings—they have done that over the past year—that would have an entirely positive effect on demand. People's propensity to save would be reduced and they would reduce their aggregate savings ratio—in other words, they would increase their aggregate consumption ratio—and demand would increase. If the Government carry out a so-called tightening by taxing savings because they think that the economy is overheating, rather than solving the problem, they will make it even worse. Consumption spending would be increased and savings would be reduced. The Government would then have to use other measures to reduce consumption spending.

Having failed to reduce consumption spending in such a way and having acted perversely by taxing savings and thereby making the problem a great deal worse, the Government have placed the whole burden of stabilising the economy on to monetary policy. The Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England has had to increase interest rates by one and a quarter percentage points since the election, which has had the effect on sterling to which the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne referred. Demand has indeed been squeezed, but only in a narrow but important sector of the economy—the internationally traded sector, which exports or competes with imports.

The most extraordinary thing is that Labour Members traditionally used to present themselves as the defenders and promoters of manufacturing industry, but they are the architects of the worst squeeze on that industry in my adult lifetime. If that is not a perverse effect of ill-conceived economic policy, I do not know what is. Hon. Members must conclude from the debate that the prospects for the British economy under such management are grim indeed.

5.48 pm

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): I shall concentrate my remarks on environmental matters in the Budget, which have been discussed previously.

I believe that the packages of measures announced in the Budget go a long way to making the car civilised. Whether we drive or not—I cannot—we all enjoy the freedom that motor cars bring, but they will bring precious little if we encounter gridlock on the nation's roads, or if our environment becomes so degraded by emissions that there is a clear and present danger to us all.

In line with our pledge, we increased road fuel duty by 6 per cent. above inflation, which will discourage unnecessary journeys and encourage the use of fuel-efficient vehicles. The carbon savings from that are likely to total 1 million tonnes a year by 2001. We must remember that road traffic is the fastest growing source of CO_2, which causes adverse climate change.

Nobody likes paying more tax, but we must judge the Budget in the round. It contains tax concessions that send strong economic signals to ordinary motorists to switch to new and more environmentally friendly transport. Next year a system of graduated vehicle excise duty will provide for a rate of £100 for the least polluting cars. The Chancellor announced a reduction of up to £500 in vehicle excise rates for low-emission lorries and buses, and that is a great advance. In addition, the duty on road fuel gases, such as liquified petroleum gas or LPG, has again been frozen because of the environmental benefits of those gases compared with petrol and diesel. Out, too, goes the perverse provision that an employee has to pay more income tax because his car has been converted by his employer to run on LPG. I am pleased that my early-day motion 705, which was tabled before the Budget and which called upon the Government to encourage the use of LPG, has received such support throughout the House.

There is no reason why a substantial market for road fuel gases should not be created in the United Kingdom, particularly among fleet operators where the potential for environmental benefit is greatest. There are mature markets in countries such as Japan and Holland, which have more than 1 million and 700,000 LPG-fuelled vehicles respectively. Those countries have mature markets and we do not because the overall fiscal framework in the United Kingdom has not encouraged substantial conversion. I hope that that will change.

I have a couple of points which I hope will be regarded as positive contributions to achieving the correct overall balance for the framework. First, in some respects, the tax system is still pulling in a different direction from the main thrust of Government policies. It is essential to give fleet owners a further boost so that they can clearly see that it makes economic sense to convert to road fuel gases. The concessions that I advocate do not have significant revenue implications because at present there are not many conversions. That is because, on balance, the fiscal framework is still unfavourable.

It would be helpful if fleet owners could write down 100 per cent. of the capital cost of conversion in the first year. There is a precedent in the 100 per cent. write-down allowance on scientific equipment. Another concession—also virtually cost-free in terms of revenue forgone—would be to zero-rate for VAT purposes work on the conversion of company car engines. Of course the Treasury does not like the setting of precedents, but the Government are pledged to recasting the tax system for the environmental good. I should like to hear the Minister's reaction to those modest proposals.

Secondly, the Chancellor has said that, later this year, he will introduce regulations to implement the £500 vehicle excise duty reduction. I hope that he will evaluate the regulations carefully because, by setting heroic targets for reductions in particulate emissions, he could achieve reductions lower than those that would flow from more modest targets. The meeting of what I understand were the Government's original targets would involve considerable outlay—about £4,000 for a particulate trap and about £28,000 for a new gas engine. In such circumstances a £500 reduction is not a great incentive. However, diesel oxidation catalysts can reduce particulate emissions by up to 60 per cent. That is rather lower than the Government's target, but, at £1,000 to £1,500 per catalyst, the technology is appreciably cheaper. For this admirable scheme to work, and to meet achievable targets, we must strike the right balance between vehicle excise duty reduction and the cost of environmental adaptation. I am sure that the Minister will strike a careful balance.

5.55 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I commend the speeches by my hon. Friends in discussing and assessing monetary and fiscal policy. I do not intend to spend time adding to their comments. The message that I have received from listening to the Budget statement and reading the Bill is that a great deal of the thinking behind fiscal and monetary policy is directed towards the establishment of long-term investment by using the tax system. Using the tax system will distort business decisions because they will be made to gain tax advantage, and that will not be in the long-term interests of the economy.

It is disappointing that the Government have not grasped the blindingly simple fact that the maintenance of low inflation will encourage long-termism in investment decisions. It is sad that time and again, the Government miss their inflation target, and I am concerned that in the long term, inflation will creep up again, thereby ensuring that the gains in changing people's attitude in favour of long-term investment will disappear. At the same time, investment decisions will be distorted by the provision of tax incentives.

An important issue that takes up only a small part of the Bill, and to which the Chief Secretary did not refer at all, is the smuggling and bootlegging of tobacco and alcohol. The Treasury's continuing policy and that of the previous Government, who made a similar mistake which I pointed out on numerous occasions, is cavalier because it fails to recognise the significant impact on society of the bootlegging industry, which undermines the rule of law. If society does not respect the law and its institutions, it will become less than civilised because the rule of law is the basis of society.

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

If the Treasury, of all institutions, and its Ministers adopt a cavalier attitude towards the importance of the rule of law, we shall have to consider seriously the long-term implications for society. Criminals are being made of innocent people, crime is being encouraged and respect for the police and customs is being reduced.

We are bringing violent crime to parts of the country that previously never expected it. The Treasury is responsible for creating protection rackets and killing the small businesses from which it expects taxation in order to be able to carry on its spending programme. It is responsible for introducing cheap tobacco and alcohol to the young and the vulnerable, the very people who, in their health policy, this Government are trying desperately to ensure do not have access to cheap tobacco and alcohol, let alone have access to them at all.

The Government are trying to ban advertising to ensure that youngsters do not have access to tobacco. They talk about increasing the age at which people can buy tobacco legally. At the same time, they are countenancing—and in this Budget, indeed, increasing the attraction of—the sale of cigarettes and hand-rolling tobacco to people who are on low budgets and who are most vulnerable to cheap tobacco sales.

This problem exists not just on the south coast and around London, but throughout the country. It exists in all the big cities and in the countryside. Unless we recognise that youngsters can get hold of cheap tobacco and that there is a huge difference between the cost of tobacco sold legally and the cost of tobacco sold through bootlegging and smuggling, any policy that we may wish to introduce—and, believe me, as a non-smoker, I recognise the damage that tobacco can do to people's health—will never encourage people to give up smoking. We are increasing the number of people who smoke and the Treasury is responsible.

When we consider the undermining of the rule of law, we have also to consider the institutions that try to enforce the current untenable situation. Customs and Excise is increasing the resources that it gives to trying to prevent innocent people from committing a crime: bringing in tobacco and alcohol cheaply. Along with the police, who throughout the country are having to enforce some of those laws, it is having to ensure that people are caught and prosecuted. In that way, its resources are diverted so that it cannot go on and fight the good fight against drugs, the results of which have been publicised in the past week.

Customs and Excise is losing the fight against drugs. Meanwhile, it is having to put money, resources and staff into trying to stop people bringing in tobacco and alcohol, which most of us recognise is not a crime. Tobacco and alcohol are accepted by society; drugs are not. Drugs are already under the control of the big international gangs. If the Government wish the big international gangs to get control of the tobacco and alcohol industry, that is their decision. They have to recognise that it is already more profitable to smuggle hand-rolling tobacco than cannabis. If heroin producers go on producing at the rate that they are alleged to be producing, it will not be long before smuggling hand-rolling tobacco is more profitable than importing heroin.

I cannot imagine that any responsible Government would wish that situation to be created, but that, in essence, is what the Treasury and Treasury Ministers are prepared to tolerate unless and until they deal seriously with the difference in customs duties.

The only way in which the Treasury can deal with the problem is to do exactly what was done in the 18th and 19th centuries—reduce duties. There are good arguments for saying that, if duties are reduced, revenue will go up because what is currently illegal becomes legal, businesses pay more tax and less is lost through benefit fraud. There is a huge amount of benefit fraud. Many people on benefits are the mules in this trade.

We have to deal with this as a problem of society, and deal with it promptly because the longer we bury our heads in the sand and the longer the Treasury believes that it is a matter of revenue only, the longer the problems of the 18th and 19th centuries will continue into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Is my hon. Friend aware that the decision of Pitt the Younger, who was, of course, a Tory Prime Minister, to reduce the duties, which eliminated smuggling at a stroke and greatly increased the revenues in the way in which she describes, coincided exactly with the introduction of the Consolidated Fund Bill, to the great benefit of the nation's resources?

Mrs. Lait: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend because the parallels between the Pitt Administration and their solution of the customs problem and today are strong.

Adam Smith made comments that remain penetratingly true:

"The smuggler would have been in every respect an excellent citizen had not the laws of his country made that a crime which nature never meant to be so".

I beg Treasury Ministers to start to recognise that we have a crime on our hands for which the Treasury is responsible and which it can cure. Unless it does, the rule of law is seriously threatened.

6.6 pm

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I should like to deal with some of the issues in the Bill that affect small and medium enterprises, particularly in my constituency, and Conservative Members' allegations that the Bill increases business taxation. I have to ask how widely some Conservative Members have consulted on the Budget and thus the Bill's contents. Perhaps some of them should get out a bit more. If they had, they might have reflected on the fact that many Labour Members have been out consulting on the Budget and have written to many of their local businesses. Their responses do not reflect some of the comments in the debate.

I have consulted my local businesses, including members of the Sikh community, many of whom run very small businesses. It is worth hearing some views from the business community on Luton's front line. The responses that I have received from that community show that it welcomed the Budget's initiatives, which will help small and medium enterprises in particular.

This is a progressive package of measures to improve incentives to investment, create jobs and cut red tape. Those businesses welcomed a radical reform of the tax

and national insurance system, which will not only mean that low-paid workers will immensely benefit from changes that will allow them to earn £81 a week before a penny of national insurance contribution needs to be paid, and that 1 million employees will be taken out of the employer-NIC charge, but make it easier for employers to create new jobs and thereby complement our new deal initiatives. That is significant for an area such as Luton. Youth unemployment in some wards in my constituency is almost double the national average, so any initiatives in the Bill that give incentives to employers to create new jobs are extremely welcome.

As those small business told me, the simplification of the system by such moves as the alignment of the national insurance contribution system to the Inland Revenue by the abolition of the NIC "entry fee", and the alignment of the lower earnings limit with income tax personal allowances is welcome.

The biggest cheer was for the fact that, as a result of the Bill, the level of corporation tax will be the lowest in Europe. That is particularly so for smaller businesses where the rate will be cut to about 20 per cent. That represents a major boost to tax profits and encourages investment. We can add to that the improvements to cash flow from the abolition of advance corporation tax, and an extension of enhanced allowances to small and medium-sized enterprises for investment in plant and machinery. All that will mean that small and medium-sized enterprises will pay about £140 million less tax in the next financial year. That is significant for smaller businesses.

I recognise that Luton is traditionally associated with larger businesses and the support given to larger industries in my area by the Treasury team is welcome. However, I regret the fact that our traditional image as a town of large industry was, sadly, transformed over the 18 years of the previous Government so that now the service sector and smaller businesses predominate. It is regrettable that the Opposition do not recognise the impact of their boom-and-bust economic policies on towns such as mine. We have seen the closure of many large and significant industries as a direct result of their policies. A little humility is called for from them when we discuss the impact on businesses.

Luton retains a significant small and medium-sized enterprise sector, and it is significant that the Budget has been particularly welcomed by that group. My comments were borne out by a recent business breakfast—I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues for attending. That breakfast was attended by many of the small and medium-sized businesses in Luton, including a company called Dairyborn. Those of us who enjoy pre-prepared pizzas and lasagnes after a hard day's work in the House may not realise that much of the grated cheese for those meals comes from that company in Luton. It had a turnover of £12.5 million last year and was named business of the year in Bedfordshire's business excellence award. The turnover is projected to grow to £15 million this year. It is a significant contributor to the local economy.

Dairyborn gave its response to the Budget and the contents of the Finance Bill. It said:

"We are particularly encouraged by the capital allowances and absolutely delighted to see a reduction in corporation tax. This Budget provides just the right level of incentive for investors interested in becoming involved in businesses like Dairyborn and the confidence to leave their money to grow with us in the future. It is a much-needed boost to British business."

The company also believes that the Budget and the Bill will encourage greater investment in the future. It says:

"It will encourage us to buy machinery we might otherwise have deferred for another year. It is important for any business to invest for the future. It is one of the things that we as a country have not been too good at."

We have not been too good at that for 18 years, which is why the Budget and the Bill are welcome. The measures will be an incentive to long-term investment and job creation. These examples, based on the consultations that I and other Labour Members have had with their businesses, show how out of touch Conservative Members really are.

Conservative Members referred to their concern at the threat that the Bill poses to what they call the golden legacy of the economy in favour of the welfare-to-work programme. What golden legacy? As I said earlier, in areas such as Luton, the legacy is one of significant unemployment, particularly youth unemployment.

The new deal and the incentives to job creation that will come about as a result of the Bill are significant to us. Recently, I helped to launch our new deal in Luton. It got off to a flying start at Luton airport because a significant contribution to the new jobs is coming from our major airlines such as Debonair, EasyJet, Monarch and Britannia, all of which have enthusiastically signed up to the new deal proposals. Even before the new deal was launched, almost 30 young people were hammering on the door of the local jobcentre, desperate for the opportunity to participate in what will be a significant contribution to their opportunities and the opportunities for the local economy.

I welcome the measures in the Bill because they will act as an incentive for investment for our small businesses. The Bill is welcomed by the small and medium-sized enterprises in Luton and will encourage greater job creation and opportunities.

On a general point, Labour Members have mentioned some of the issues that we hope will be addressed in further discussions on the Budget, particularly alleviating the poverty traps that we inherited from the ramshackle benefit and economic policies of the previous Government. I hope that we shall see some progressive measures to tackle the problems of the poverty trap in relation to housing benefit, to which other hon. Members have referred.

I finish by making a plea. As a result of the Government's economic policies, we shall have a golden opportunity in that we shall see a fall in the public sector borrowing requirement to £5 billion in 1997–98 and to zero in two years. I should like to suggest, and hope, that in a future Budget or Finance Bill, we take that golden opportunity to further reinforce our themes of investment in the long term and job creation by using that favourable PSBR level to consider a switch to a general Government financial deficit. That would open opportunities for much greater investment, particularly in affordable housing, which could tackle the poverty trap and social exclusion and increase job creation. It could be done by such a move and by the introduction of quasi-corporations for housing. That idea has been worked on for over four years by many

[Ms Margaret Moran]

in local government. It is in line with the Government's thinking on long-term investment and job opportunities, and I hope to welcome it in a future Finance Bill.

6.18 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): The Finance Bill is a huge Bill in all sorts of ways, not least because of the huge number of betrayals that it sets out for the British people. It is a remarkable Bill for several reasons. It is remarkable because of the number of taxes that it raises, including a tax on fuel, stamp duty, company car fuel scales, taxes on landfill, tobacco and casinos, and holiday insurance—the list is endless.

The Bill is also remarkable for what is not in it. The centrepiece of the Chancellor's statement was the welfare-to-work policy. There is not a clause on it or a mention of it in the Bill, despite the fact that we heard great claims for it in the Chancellor's statement.

The Bill is also extraordinary because, yet again, the Labour Government are using instruments to accrue power in other places. They are taking power away from the House and are giving it to the Treasury. They are using secondary legislation to allow the Chancellor and his colleagues to take the power of debate away from the House. On those grounds, the Bill is to be deplored.

The Bill has come about, the Government tell us, through a great deal of public consultation. Quite what the difference is between public consultation and leaks and trails I am not quite clear with this Government, but on the issues on which they might have conducted considerable public consultation, they have singularly failed. The manufacturing industry and the service sector are screaming for help because of the dangerously high pound. It is beginning to cost jobs throughout the country, yet the Government claim that there is nothing they can do to save these companies from imminent bankruptcy. The Government want to put into place a welfare-to-work project, yet they preside over a mechanism that is throwing people out of work and on to welfare.

The Government could and should take action, but their Bill takes no action that will be helpful to the employment prospects of manufacturing industry. Manufacturing industry is teetering on the brink of technical recession. Output has decreased by 0.5 per cent. in the three months to February. We await the figures for March, which will come out in May, but we suspect that they will be as bad or worse. The Red Book expects export growth to be more than halved in 1998, from 8 per cent. last year to 3.25 per cent. this year.

The Budget is presented in the context of new ambitions for Britain, yet much in the Bill will destroy the ambitions of many in Britain. It will hurt their employment prospects and it will not enhance the companies for which they work.

The Chief Secretary spoke of inheriting a mess. The truth is that it is the Labour Government who are creating a mess. Let us take the centrepiece of the Government's plan to make it easier to take on lower-paid employees. Next year, the Government will revamp the employers' national insurance regime, with cuts in national insurance contributions for lower-paid employees, yet because the Government want revenue, they will raise employers' national insurance contributions by 25 per cent.—from 10 per cent. to 12.2 per cent.—and employment costs will increase. It is an incentive to pay people lower wages and it will, of course, produce unemployment.

There are two areas of taxation on which I shall dwell: corporation tax and capital gains tax. The Bill has much to say to the corporate sector. The big issue for many large companies will undoubtedly be the move from the current corporation tax payment system to a new quarterly payments regime. It will hurt those companies and cost them billions of pounds. The companies affected will face a cash flow hit in the next few years as a result.

Although the cut in the corporation tax main rate to 30 per cent. offers some compensation, there will be a doubling up of payments as the transition to the new regime begins. The change will hurt because the transition takes place over three years. It will provide the Exchequer with an additional £7.5 billion in cash, which will be taken away from the companies that will provide investment and employment for the future. Companies in this country will be severely hit.

The change will hurt because it will create problems in relation to payment. The proposed clause on interest is of major importance because quarterly payments are to be based on estimates of the current year's liability. Companies will have to project taxable profits for the year at the half-year. That means an additional burden on business. The change will hurt because it will place particular difficulty on seasonal businesses, such as retailers, throughout the country. The Government seek to mask all this by pushing forward their cut in corporation tax. Conservative Members support tax cuts, but we do not support the additional costs and burdens in the Bill that far outstrip the cut in corporate taxation.

We have long argued for simplification and fairness in capital gains tax and, indeed, the removal, when appropriate, of indexation. The Government's proposals achieve neither of those strategic goals. Indeed, up to 34 different rates of capital gains tax are proposed. That is hardly simplification in any form. Given the Government's failure to hit their own inflation targets, it is not much comfort for the investor either.

The Chancellor made much of his attempt to encourage enterprise and long-term investment. It is difficult to see how an additional £20 billion of taxes piled on by the Government in this Parliament will assist enterprise. It is difficult to see how a family now £1,000 a year worse off because of the Labour Government's higher taxes and mortgage interest payments will be able to make long-term investments. If the Chancellor is so keen to promote investment and enterprise, why has he so massively increased the taxes and burdens on business in the past two Budgets?

Capital gains tax, as proposed, will be difficult to administer. The introduction of tapering of CGT from 40 per cent. for higher-rate taxpayers after two years to 24 per cent. after 10 years will make calculating tax liabilities a horrendous job. It will distort the gains. Taxpayers making regular or frequent investments in shares or unit trusts will not benefit fully. Until all the shares are sold, the full gain from holding them will not be received.

The proposal is deceptive because longer-term rates in the Bill may look attractive, but indexation that decreases tax to take account of inflation will be frozen in April. Tax will have to be paid even on gains that result purely

from inflation. The justification for scrapping indexation, the Chancellor tells us, is the low-inflation environment in which the economy now operates.

In being so critical of the previous Government, the Chief Secretary appears to ignore the inheritance of the Labour Government. Inflation was at its lowest sustained level in nearly 50 years. However, we can never be complacent because even at its current level of 3.3 per cent., inflation still has an impact. With inflation at 3.3 per cent. a year, in 10 years, the value of £100 today would be cut to £71.50—a fall of 28.5 per cent. That is a noticeable drop. The Chancellor is, perhaps, too confident in his belief that the days of inflation are over. What if—in the wake of the proposed changes—inflation rises faster than the value of assets? Long-term investors will pay capital gains tax on purely nominal gains.

The saddest thing is that the proposals for capital gains tax are based on a fallacy—that long-term investors are morally correct and that short-term investors are morally incorrect. It is a sign that the Government do not understand the nature of a successful market. This tax measure will come between the investor and his or her economic decision. It will distort the investment market—it is not by chance that we have heard the words "distort" and "distortion" used repeatedly this afternoon. It will encourage investors to leave money in inefficient companies, so those companies will retain equity capital that is far cheaper than they probably deserve. Investors will effectively be subsidising inefficient companies. The measure is a distortion, and a dangerous one at that.

The Bill gives effect to the Government's second Budget. It comes from a party that promised not to raise taxes or interfere in the market yet, clause by clause, the Government demonstrate their will and their determination to break every promise, to raise taxes wherever they can and to interfere and distort the market at every opportunity. Just as they have broken their promises not to raise taxes, so they have broken their pledges on spending.

In his Budget statement, the Chancellor made much of the extra money that would be found for the health service, so why is my local community hospital in Burford facing closure, and why are 25 per cent. of the beds at the next nearest hospital about to be removed? The answer is that the Government have broken their promise to the people of this country to find the extra money that they said would be found for the health service. Indeed, they have found less. The Chancellor assured the House that extra money would be found, but Burford community hospital will close, not because the people want it closed, but because the Government have not considered the people's needs. The Government have wilfully turned their back on the people of Burford and Witney.

The Finance Bill is not unique, but resembles much of the Government's other legislation. It is misleading and damaging, and very destructive of Britain's long-term interests. It piles tax on tax, it savages the incentive to save, it distorts the workings of the marketplace and it gives even more power to the Treasury, which will be able to operate without the need for debate in the House.

This is a bad Bill and a deceptive one, whose detail betrays the fact that the Government are not ambitious for Britain—and certainly not for a single Britain—but ambitious for power and ambitious to get their hands on the people's money.

6.32 pm

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) is a professional spinner—that is how he made his money before 1 May. I do not know whether he wants us to judge him on the results of 1 May or on his speech today, but the latter was largely a collection of fantasies. The hon. Gentleman is also distinctly off message, because his Front-Bench colleagues were saying that there had not been a fiscal tightening on the household sector, yet his line was that we were somehow taxing people until the pips squeaked.

I regard the Bill as one more piece of the jigsaw or larger picture which the Government are completing to ensure a fairer society and economic stability and to promote enterprise. I shall concentrate on those three points.

It is clear that, unless we can achieve economic stability, we shall not have stable levels of growth and employment. The Government have taken several important steps to promote stability, including giving operational independence to the Bank of England. As we heard again yesterday in the debate on the Bank of England Bill, Conservative Members are still not happy with that measure, although, as the hon. Member for Witney just proved, they do not seem able to agree among themselves.

Mr. Woodward: If the hon. Gentleman is so proud of the achievements of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, does he support the current level of sterling against the deutschmark, and does he hope that it stays at that level?

Mr. Cranston: First, the pound has gone up 25 per cent. but most of that increase happened under the previous Government. Secondly, the market's judgment of the change involving the Bank of England has been distinctly positive. The hon. Gentleman need only read about the long-term interest rates reported daily in the financial press to see that favourable judgment.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that, at the time that the Bank of England was given its putative independence, there was a change of Government? We moved from minority government to a Government with a large majority. That would always have an effect on long-term gilt yields by increasing investor confidence, regardless of which party won the election.

Mr. Cranston: That is certainly a very good argument for what the people did on 1 May when they voted us in with a massive majority. I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point for me.

In addition to taking the specific step involving the Bank of England, the Chancellor reaffirmed the inflation target in the Budget. He also elaborated once again the golden rule on Government debt, and set out the achievements that we have been able to reap so far in terms of deficit reduction. The figures in the Red Book show that, in the coming years, there will be a substantial reduction in Government debt. That is how it should be at this stage of the economic cycle. The comprehensive spending review will make medium-term planning so

[Mr. Cranston]

much more feasible, but I shall concentrate on the code for fiscal stability, the key principles of which are set out in clause 151.

We heard much from the Opposition about the lack of consultation, about irresponsibility and so on, but the code for fiscal stability shows yet again the Government's commitment to transparency, stability, responsibility and fairness. Not only a Red Book but an economic and fiscal strategy report, and a debt management report, will be published. They will all be underpinned by the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General who will report on these matters and on the underlying assumptions. All this strengthens the credibility of fiscal policy and debt management policy and contributes to economic stability. Of course, none of this was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat–Amory); instead, he revealed the parsimonious spirit which we so often hear from him.

Never have a Government consulted so widely, and I shall cite just one example. Clause 42 sets out the move away from a cash basis for calculating profits for trades and professions. When the issue was first mooted, it was clear that it had serious implications for the Bar and especially for younger barristers. The Bar Council and several people, including myself, made representations to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary about the measure's serious disincentive effects on young barristers.

Mr. Brooke: Does the hon. Gentleman feel that the decision to publish the notice about the clause to which he is now referring after the House had risen for Christmas was in line with the transparency to which he was paying tribute in clause 151?

Mr. Cranston: The right hon. Gentleman makes the point that the notice was published just before Christmas, but that is in the nature of things. Following that, there have been extensive discussions, which are continuing, and the Bar Council has been brought into the discussions about how the final measure will be drafted. Last week, it appeared to be reasonably satisfied with the recognition in clause 43 of the position of younger members of the Bar.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Is the hon. Gentleman satisfied with the basic principle that has been adopted by the Government in respect of the taxation of professionals? The press release published by the Inland Revenue states that the old system was not a form of tax avoidance, but the changes in respect of timing will bring in an extra £40 million a year. How does the hon. Gentleman square that with the inordinate amount of time and bother that will be foisted on every professional taxed under the old system by the change to the new one?

Mr. Cranston: It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman has just wandered into the Chamber. If he stays and listens to the debate, some of his questions will be answered.

Let me move on to the second theme of the Bill—the promotion of enterprise. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) mentioned the benefits of the reduction in corporation tax for industry in her constituency. Earlier in the debate, mention was made of the abolition of advance corporation tax. The method of payment of corporation tax will be especially beneficial to smaller companies. The continuation of the enhanced capital allowances will also benefit small and medium-sized enterprises.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South, I have met representatives of industry in my constituency. In the past three weeks, I have attended two meetings organised by Dudley chamber of commerce, which is especially active. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) agrees. Under the dynamic leadership of Charles Hanmer, it is a very go-ahead organisation. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to learn that members of the Dudley chamber of commerce have met more Ministers in the past 12 months than in the past 12 years. They are especially grateful for visits from my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Members of the Dudley chamber of commerce are not natural supporters of the Labour party, but they were most complimentary about the three measures in respect of corporation tax, enhanced capital allowances and the small business concession in respect of the abolition of advance corporation tax.

I should like to devote some time to two measures. The first concerns capital gains tax and the taper relief that will be introduced under clause 119. It is part of a larger review of capital gains tax. Opposition Members have suggested that it breaches an economic rule that the tax system should never be used to affect behaviour. Where have they been for the past 18 years if they do not think that the tax system is constantly used to influence economic behaviour?

Those of us who have advised on transactions will often realise that a particular transaction is tax-driven, and there is no doubt that it is accepted that the tax system is used to try to influence behaviour, and that business decisions are influenced by tax considerations. We do not live in a perfect world, where all decision making by businesses is tax-neutral. I support the sentiments behind the clause.

I should mention one technical aspect that no doubt will be discussed in detail in Committee—the approach adopted in respect of tapering. In other countries where an attempt has been made to encourage the long-term holding of assets, legislation has tried to distinguish between assets held for speculative as opposed to investment purposes and that has given rise to a great deal of tricky decision making by tax tribunals and tax courts. It seems to me that the tapered approach in the Bill, under which time is used as a measure of investment, is the right one.

I should mention that, at my meetings with Dudley chamber of commerce, concern was expressed about the high value of sterling. Dudley is in the centre of an important manufacturing region—the black country—and there is no doubt that there are such concerns. However, at the second meeting, I was able to discuss some of those concerns in greater detail, and, on closer examination, it transpired that they were not as catastrophic as some commentators had made out. First, some of the transactions engaged in by members of the chamber of

commerce were conducted in dollars. Of course, the movement of the pound against the dollar has not been as significant as it has against the deutschmark.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Could the hon. Gentleman give the House an estimate of the number of jobs that might have been lost in the manufacturing sector in his constituency as a result of the Government's high-pound policy?

Mr. Cranston: The members of Dudley chamber of commerce whom I met did not report any job losses. They intimated that there might be job losses in future, but at this stage none has been reported to me.

Let me develop the theme a little further. Secondly, it transpired from my more detailed discussions with Dudley chamber of commerce that many members of the chamber had not used in the past, and were not contemplating using, the hedging devices that can provide some protection from fluctuating currency values. I shall write to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade suggesting that the Department considers a more active policy of making known to smaller businesses the financial products that can be used as protection against currency movements.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: What on earth would be the point of encouraging the DTI to adopt those instruments, when the Chancellor has said that the pound is at an unsustainably high level? Firms adopting the instruments would merely put themselves in a loss-making situation if the pound decreased.

Mr. Cranston: The hon. Gentleman has just wandered into the Chamber, and I was talking about the DTI helping to promote the use of particular instruments.

Incidentally, one of the chamber members at the discussion said that one of his customers had recently told him about a future deal in euros. At the suggestion of this member of the chamber—who happened to be a local bank manager—the manufacturer was going to consider a hedging device. I hope that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) now appreciates that these devices are available, and some can be used in future.

The third point that members of the chamber had to concede was that the United Kingdom economy is an open economy, and that there was instability as a result of the single currency moves in Europe and the economic crisis in Asia. At the end of the discussions, the catastrophic predictions which some members of the chamber were echoing transpired not to be as serious as first suggested.

I wish to refer to fiscal tightening in terms of stability. We pledged that we would not increase personal rates of taxation. I know that it is difficult for Conservative Members to understand the notion of adhering to election promises. In terms of maintaining the trust of the people, there is no way we can break that promise. That is one limit on what we can do.

Mr. Ruffley: The Labour party did not merely say that it would not increase tax rates—it went further. The Prime Minister said that no tax increases were implied by his party's programme. Would the hon. Gentleman care to answer that point? Is not the Labour party guilty of a colossal betrayal of the trust of the British people?

Mr. Cranston: We need no lectures from the hon. Gentleman on betrayals of the trust of the British people.

There has been a substantial fiscal tightening, and the hon. Member for Witney referred to a huge fiscal tightening. The only positive suggestion we have heard from Opposition Front Benchers is that somehow we should encourage saving—but that is precisely what our proposals for ISAs are designed to achieve.

I wish to refer to fairness—and again I know that it is difficult for Conservative Members to understand that notion. The Bill is set in a wider context in terms of making work pay, our new deal proposals, our Green Paper on welfare reform, and the working families tax credit proposals.

The Bill proposes a new regime for transfer pricing. For many years, multinational enterprises have used transfer pricing as a method of tax minimisation. Clause 106 is a genuine attempt to deal with this matter by introducing the notion of advance pricing arrangements, whereby multinational enterprises can enter into particular arrangements with the Inland Revenue.

Part I promotes the use of low-emission fuels and vehicles—my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) addressed that issue. I have heard nothing from Conservative Members about the provisions in clauses 47 and 48 for promoting millennium gift aid. Clause 47 deals with gifts which manufacturers might make of machinery to universities in third-world countries, or gifts that members of the legal profession might make of law books to universities in developing countries. Clause 47 will promote such assistance. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not seem to appreciate that altruism is a virtue promoted by the Bill. Clause 48 deals with gifts of money for relief in poorer countries.

In terms of fairness, promoting enterprise and guaranteeing economic stability, the Bill makes a substantial contribution, and I support it.

6.55 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I may be the only Member in the Chamber—I hope I am not—who found the speech by the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) rather entertaining. The notion that the high level of sterling is not causing problems for the British economy is, frankly, laughable. He said that he would help business by writing to the President of the Board of Trade to promote hedging—to get her to intervene. However, the hedging will have to be retrospective. If the hon. Gentleman can find me a broker who can advise me on how I can hedge retrospectively, I would like to write to him, because I am sure that I could make millions, if not billions, of pounds. I am afraid that his argument falls at the first hurdle.

I will be arguing against the Second Reading of the Bill, and my party will vote against Second Reading; not because there are not welcome measures within the Bill—there are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made clear—but because it fails to give the country and the wider economy the fiscal policy they

[Mr. Edward Davey]

need. That policy is needed partly because of the high level of sterling, which has the potential to put our economy into recession.

There is the potential—it is unlikely—that the recession could be economy-wide, but it is likely, and probable now, that certain pockets of our economy will go into recession. For example, manufacturing looks like teetering on the brink of recession. The agricultural sector—mentioned by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney)—is, due to a number of other issues, in crisis. The high level of sterling looks like putting that sector into recession.

The whole economy may not go into recession because, unlike the last time we had such a high level of sterling—in the 1979-81 recession—the economy does not have a large manufacturing sector. If it did, the whole economy would now be in recession. It is only because the economy is so based on the service sector that it is not.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a contrast with the recession of the early 1980s, when there was a great deal of fat and inefficiency in manufacturing industry, which we ironed out so that the very best companies could survive? Now, it is the best companies which are being pushed to the limit by high exchange rates.

Mr. Davey: If the hon. Gentleman expects me to back a recession because it threw 1 million people on to the dole, he is being ridiculous. There was an appalling error in economic policy in that period—the fact that the present Government are making similar mistakes does not make those policies correct.

In the next few months, many hon. Members will say—in questions, points of order and debates—that there is a recession in their constituencies. Hon. Members whose constituents rely on the industries that are particularly affected by the high level of the pound—manufacturing and agriculture—are likely to see a significant rise in unemployment in their areas. This is a genuine problem, and I do not think that the "R" word—recession—has been sufficiently discussed tonight.

It is ironic that the Government are not tackling the high pound and its effects on manufacturing industry. I remember that, only a few years ago, one could not turn on the television without seeing the current Chancellor of Exchequer fixing his eye on the camera, dropping his jaw and saying with determination that the then Government were not doing enough for manufacturing industry. Now that he is in government, he too is failing to do enough.

One wonders whether new Labour any longer cares about manufacturing industry. Perhaps it is more interested in cool Britannia, to use those awful words—it seems to be more interested in the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards than in the Queen's award for industry. Unless it starts to support manufacturing industry, it will be promoting the "Full Monty" society, which is more focused on the service sector than on manufacturing—ironically, the storyline of that film describes the Government's policy.

The Government give a litany of excuses for their inaction. They say, as we heard from the hon. Member for Dudley, North, that the pound's appreciation mostly occurred before the election. So what? Labour is in government now, and it has to tackle the problem. The Government say that the power lies only with the Bank of England, but that is not right—the Chancellor still controls fiscal policy. They say that he has tightened fiscal policy, but that is a myth. There has been some tightening, but most of it has arisen automatically because of the economic cycle. Only yesterday, we heard that the public sector borrowing requirement had shrunk to below £1 billion for this year as a result of the higher tax revenues deriving from the growth in the economy.

The tighter fiscal policy has nothing to do with the Government's actions. Moreover, tightening fiscal policy is effective only when it is discretionary, not automatic. The Government have not used fiscal policy in the way that is necessary to balance the economy. In so far as they have used it, they have not targeted the problems that are causing an increase in demand.

Mr. Cranston: Will the hon. Gentleman explain what particular measures of fiscal policy he is talking about? Will he also say something about time lags?

Mr. Davey: I am more than happy to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions. If he had been listening, he would have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon outline some of our fiscal policies, although I am happy to repeat them. We have for a long time argued for a penny on income tax to take money out of consumers' pockets, and for higher taxes on tobacco, both of which would have had an effect. If he wants, I shall send him copies of our alternative Budgets and costed manifestos, which spell out our policies in great detail.

The Government sound like the Conservative Government during the 1979–81 recession. The then Prime Minister said, "There is no alternative"—TINA, as the policy was christened. I wonder who the TINA is in the current Government. We could tighten fiscal policy, but there is an alternative—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon said, we could have a proper, long-term European policy.

As the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said, one of the Government's great failings is that they have failed to set out a long-term strategy on the single currency. That is having devastating effects; it has contributed significantly to the appreciation of the pound.

Investors in the foreign exchanges—indeed, all those operating those financial markets—are understandably cautious in advance of the formation of the single currency, and they regard the pound as a safe haven. They are buying sterling not because it has great virtues in itself, but as a hedge. Again, the speculators are undermining our economy, but the Government are failing to tackle that problem.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Is it not the case that speculators regard sterling as a hedge not only because it will be outside the single currency, but because the Government are softening the single currency by fudging the Maastricht criteria and allowing the lira into the euro and the drachma into the exchange rate mechanism? Do the Liberal Democrats support the admission of the lira into the euro and the admission of the drachma into the ERM?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman fails to make his case. The markets have passed a sound judgment on the future

of the euro. Long-term interest rates for the franc and the deutschmark are lower than United States bond rates over 10 years, which means that the markets are judging the euro favourably.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: That is even allowing for Italy and Greece.

Mr. Davey: As my hon. Friend says, that is even allowing for Italy and Greece. The financial markets see no problem, and I had understood that the Conservative party supported the financial markets—perhaps it is changing its position, and becoming the "new Tory" party.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that long-term bond yields can signal something other than low inflation—they may signal recession? The 10-year rates in these currencies may be signalling the fact that, as a result of the euro, Europe faces a long recession, partly because of the pursuit of the wrong monetary policies and partly because of its inflexible labour markets.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman redefines financial economics as we know it. Most economic equations take the long-term bond rate as an indicator of expectations of inflation. If he wants to rewrite economics, he will not get far in these debates.

Clause 158 outlines the various measures that the House will have to agree because of the adoption of the single currency by other member states. The fact that we are legislating because we are not prepared to take real decisions is a sorry state of affairs—we are preparing for being unprepared to decide the long-term future of our economy. The Government have said that they are preparing the economy for the single currency, but the Bill clearly shows that they are not.

The Government's position on the single currency has long been illogical—I wonder why that has not been pointed out by more commentators. The Government are asking companies to prepare for the single currency—to invest in training their employees and in the systems that will be needed to run the single currency—but why should companies do so? The Government have put off the referendum, which will rightly be the final decision, until after the next general election—only then will companies know whether Britain is to join the single currency. Why should one spend millions of pounds in preparation when the people's verdict will not be given for several years? The Government are asking the impossible—their policy defies logic.

The only sustainable position on the single currency is to have an early referendum and let the people decide as soon as possible, so that we can take the economic measures that will be required as a result of the people's verdict. That would not only enable us to develop long-term economic policy, but, fortuitously, help us out of some of our short-term difficulties arising from the over-valued pound, which would bring great benefits to agriculture and manufacturing across the country.

The Government may have many reasons for not pursuing a more long-term approach to the currency—perhaps they have political reasons. As a new Member, I may be a bit naive, but I think that there may be a political calculation. If the Government are to prepare the country properly for the single currency, they will have to join a currency arrangement—either the exchange rate mechanism or the new arrangement that will have to be made after 1 January next year with the introduction of the euro.

Because of experience with the ERM, the Government are afraid to admit that that is what is required. They should have more confidence. After 1 January next year, with the irrevocable locking of exchange rates in 12 nations in the European Union, we will be in a completely different currency debate. The ERM will be history, and no grid arrangements will be needed to manage the exchange rates for currencies outside the single currency. There will have to be a completely different currency management system.

The Government should be using the European presidency to describe such a new currency management system in far greater detail, to enable the British economy to enter it in due course. That is the hole at the heart of the Government's economic policy, and it is causing businesses and communities throughout the country great hardship.

That policy area is also a hole at the heart of the Conservatives' strategy, and we heard almost nothing about it from the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) occasionally sets out his penn'orth on the radio, but the official Treasury spokesman says nothing. We do not know what the current Conservative thinking is on the single currency.

The Government have made a great step forward on insurance premium tax, by levelling it up for travel agents. That has largely tackled the problem for that industry, but other industries affected by the distortion caused by insurance premium tax at the current rates have been left out.

Many companies other than travel agencies—for example, car dealerships and television rental companies—sell insurance as a complementary product. Those companies are losing out to insurance brokers, because, with the current insurance premium tax regime, it is more expensive for them than for the brokers to provide insurance. A real tax distortion remains, despite the Government's other welcome decisions.

This is a bleat not for the industry but for consumers. The tax distortion is changing the marketplace substantially, especially for cars, but also for rented televisions and white goods. Car dealers and others are being moved away from the insurance-based policy approach that they have had for some years to a guarantee approach.

Figures that I have seen suggest that 50 per cent. of used cars that are sold come with guarantees rather than insurance policies. That sets us back many years: for the past 20 years, and especially the past 10, the move was towards insurance-based policies, which afford consumers far greater protection.

That is not a theoretical point: it is actually happening out there in the marketplace. The Financial Secretary should consider what will happen when a large car dealership goes bust and all the guarantees that it has given become worthless. The insurance-based approach ensures that the protection continues, but the distortion will lead to many consumers finding that they do not have the protection they thought they had.

[Mr. Davey]

There may be a solution, and I hope that we can agree one in Committee. The industries to which I have referred are not the same as travel agencies: they sell different products. The travel agency industry could not go down the guarantee route, because it often sells life insurance, a far more substantial form of insurance, which could not apply to parts and labour for a car, for example; so the solution that the Government have rightly put in the Bill for travel agencies would not be suitable for car dealerships and other affected businesses.

My investigations suggest that an insurance premium tax rate of perhaps 10 to 12 per cent. would level the tax playing field for the affected industries, and prevent competitive pressures from making businesses go down the guarantee route. I have good news for Treasury Ministers: such a change would increase tax revenue. They are losing tax revenue because of the guarantees. I hope that the PSBR will decline a little further if the Government take up my kind offer. I implore Treasury Ministers at the very least to meet representatives of the industries and discuss the problems. I am sure that a suitable compromise can be reached.

The Bill does not contain tax incentives for profit-related pay, but it should. Those incentives fell into disorder under the previous Government; they were widely abused and widely criticised. Indeed, some of that criticism came from the Liberal Democrats. That Government reacted by taking a hammer to crack a nut: they abolished all tax incentives for profit-related pay, rather than reforming the system.

We are in favour of limited tax relief for profit-related pay, to help those who gain from profits through their wage packets but are on only modest incomes. Such a system would not be abused by the wealthy, and the relief would go to those on average or below-average earnings, for whom the profit-related part of their remuneration is very valuable. I suggest a ceiling of £1,000, which is modest by any standards and would not lead to the abuse that occurred under the previous regime.

I welcome the changes to the tax regime surrounding liquefied petroleum gas—road fuel gas—in terms both of converting car fleets and of freezing the duty, but the Government could have gone a lot further. Councils throughout the country are trying to promote environmentally sound policies. The council in the royal borough of Kingston bought gas-powered vehicles to do its bit. The Government have the power to go much further, and ensure that such vehicles are bought far more widely in the private sector.

As a new Member, I seek some guidance from the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps not now, but later, outside the Chamber. The Liberal Democrats tabled an amendment to today's motion that was signed by six Members of Parliament, and the official Opposition tabled an amendment that was signed by only one, so I found it odd that that amendment was preferred to our more widely supported one.

To say that I am looking forward to sitting on the Finance Bill Standing Committee would be a slight exaggeration or overstatement, given the size of the Bill, although I am of course looking forward to discussions and debate with Ministers. As for tonight, the Bill fails to provide the fiscal policy that is needed to re-balance our economy, and it will not receive the support of Liberal Democrat Members.

7.19 pm

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): This year, it would nice if the Liberal Democrats turned up to the Finance Bill Standing Committee, unlike last year, but we shall see.

I am pleased to be able to speak and to welcome the Budget and the Finance Bill. One thing that has come over clearly is how warmly welcomed the Budget was. My local newspaper carried a number of interviews with local people, the overwhelming majority of whom said how pleased they were with most of the Budget measures. In fact, one constituent was moved to say of the Government:

"They seem to be knuckling down and getting things done."

That underlines what the Government are doing, particularly in the Budget and the Finance Bill.

Many measures were welcomed, in particular the increase in child benefit and the working families tax credit. The Chancellor has made it clear that the Budget will secure economic stability, reward work, encourage enterprise and promote fairness for families and children, which are all most welcome.

The new agenda requires co-ordinated action, using the full range of the Government's economic, tax and spending powers, which we have seen in the Budget and in the Bill. All are important and all are part of the co-ordinated approach.

Like many other Labour Members, I welcomed last July's Budget, which laid the groundwork and the economic framework to deliver the goals that I mentioned, in particular the new deal to get the young, the long-term unemployed and lone parents into jobs and the massive additional boost for schools and the national health service.

I particularly welcome the statements in the Red Book on creating a fairer and more equal society now and in the future—a number of commentators have remarked on that. I also welcome the statement about growing inequality, about giving serious consideration to improving equality and taking account not only of the short-term social consequences but of the fact that inequality can weaken the long-term potential of the economy. Those are important statements. Possibly, it is the first time that the Red Book has enshrined a target to reduce inequality alongside the usual monetary objectives. Those statements underline the major differences between our economic strategy and that of the previous Government and answer some of the critics of our strategy.

As a result of the 18 years of Tory government, our productivity and living standards have fallen behind those of Europe and the United States. Those major policy initiatives will close the gap between our living standards and those of our main competitors.

The new financial framework put in place by the Chancellor was welcome, as it will reduce the unnecessary volatility in the economic cycle—again, it is a major trademark. The Chancellor was right to say that the boom and bust under the previous Government wreaked havoc in manufacturing industry and severely

reduced investment in the private sector; we have seen the long-term consequences for unemployment in the past 18 years.

I support the disciplined approach to fiscal policy that the Chancellor has shown. In some respects, the lack of such an approach was a weakness of previous Labour Governments, which caused them major problems. The underlying fiscal stance has been tightened by 2 per cent. of the gross domestic product for 1997–98, and I think that the Liberal Democrats were incorrect, as that 2 per cent. is quite a stiff tightening of fiscal policy.

Mr. Cranston: They want to change travel insurance.

Mr. Twigg: Yes, I know. Labour Members want to talk about the major issues.

The Chancellor has also proposed a number of measures, which we welcome, to increase the transparency and accountability of this and future Budgets. As has been said, transparency and accountability are important in this Budget. They are something that our record can be measured by and that we are proud of and willing to undertake, unlike previous Governments. As one commentator said:

"It is certainly the most ambitious and probably coherent statement of a Government's overall economic objectives for some time."

That is praise indeed.

The Government want to turn their ambition into achievement. The Bill and the Budget proposals will keep faith with the people who put their trust in new Labour. There will be more money to cut NHS waiting lists and school class sizes.

I could comment on many aspects of the Bill, but one measure is close to my heart. I wrote to the Chancellor about the extension of the additional personal allowance following contact with a constituent. With effect from 6 April 1997—which is backdated, which I welcome—the additional personal allowance will be extended to women with children and incapacitated husbands living with them. Previously, it had been available only to a parent who was not living with a spouse and to fathers with incapacitated wives. That is an important change as regards equality and fairness, and I was particularly pleased, because the issue was raised by a constituent. I am not suggesting that because I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on behalf of that constituent, the policy was changed—I am sure that other people have written to him, too—but it is an example of the Government listening to people and showing equality and fairness in their Budget policies. I am delighted that that cause has been taken up.

Fairness in tax and spending is important. Clearly, the Budget will result in a redistribution of resources to the least well-off in society. The £250 million extra for schools and skills again demonstrates the Government's commitment to education, and many of my constituents have warmly welcomed it, as they have the £500 million package to cut NHS waiting lists. As an example of how that can be used to great effect, last year, when the extra money was given for winter pressures, Halton hospital—my local hospital—was able to use the £300,000 that it received from the extra resources to set up a special team to go to people's houses, particularly to the elderly, to give them help, support and medical care, which resulted in them not having to spend weeks on end in hospital, blocking beds and increasing waiting lists, but staying in the comfort of their homes. That policy was so successful that the hospital is hoping to continue with it. Many of the people who benefited from that new initiative in Halton have been demanding that it should continue. That is just one of a number of examples that I could quote of our innovation and of how putting the money to good effect can bring about real improvements in people's lives.

In terms of fairness, I also welcome the measures to curb tax avoidance and close loopholes, to remove unfair advantage and detect evasion. They will yield substantial income in the coming years. The measures are about fairness and will protect ordinary taxpayers, ensuring a fairer tax system. They will protect funding for the priorities of health, education and jobs, which are the people's priorities. We want people to contribute to a fair taxation scheme.

Clearly, the Government will be giving a great deal of help to business because of the Budget, particularly small businesses. Many small business people have told me how welcome the initiatives are. A number of business representatives have been quoted in national newspapers as saying how welcome the Budget was and how it was very much a Budget for business. The 1 per cent. cut from April 1999 in the main rate of corporation tax will bring it to 30 per cent., the lowest rate ever—something that the Opposition never did, and one could see the shock on their faces when the Chancellor announced that new initiative. That was about helping business and improving enterprise, and it will also promote long-term investment.

Mr. Ruffley: How can the £20 billion extra levied on business in the lifetime of this Parliament possibly be good for and in the interests of business?

Mr. Twigg: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his figures, but, as commentators have recognised, the Budget is business friendly and will help business. It is important that we recognise that. Many of the things that the Government have done since they have been in power, not merely in this but in the previous Budget, have been welcomed by business overall. The real burden on business was imposed by the previous Tory Government.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Who are more business friendly: the previous Government, who cut corporation tax from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent., or this Government, who have just cut it from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent.?

Mr. Twigg: What is more business friendly is that, unlike the previous Government, who got rid of two out of every five manufacturing jobs and decimated manufacturing industry, we are providing the climate for sustainable investment for business in future. That is the difference.

Mr. Cranston: Some of the Opposition call for fiscal tightening; some are against it. I cannot work it out. Perhaps my hon. Friend can help me.

Mr. Twigg: I am afraid that I cannot. Policy depends on who is speaking. In the Conservative party, there are

[Mr. Twigg]

different views on various matters. I cannot answer that question. We shall have to wait, to find what future speakers come up with.

There is a comprehensive package to help create a dynamic small business sector, in which, as everyone recognises, most of the jobs growth will occur. The cut in the rate of corporation tax by 1 per cent. to 20 per cent. was very welcome.

The capital gains tax package will encourage and reward long-term investment and will be fair to all. The capital gains tax taper introduced for individuals will reward risk taking and encourage enterprise for the longer term, particularly through the holding of business assets. Also welcome is the higher-rate taxpayers capital gains tax rate reduction from 40 per cent. to 10 per cent. for business assets. We have also reduced the burden of national insurance on employers, for low and middle-income employees.

It would be remiss not to refer further to the Government's new deal initiatives. In areas such as mine, with high unemployment among the young and many long-term unemployed, lone parents and disabled people, the measures have been most welcome. Some 700 to 800 young people will be helped by the new deal. From talking to young people who will be part of the new deal, I know that they welcome it as a real commitment by the Government to helping them, to providing support and to giving them an opportunity for a kick start in life. That is only one example. I have talked to other young people, and they do not believe the scare stories put about by Opposition parties.

On lone parents, I was at an event on Saturday. The Benefits Agency had set up a family day for lone parents to hear what the new deal had to offer and about the Government's Budget proposals on benefits such as child benefit. I was amazed by the number of people who did not realise what a good package the Government had put together and by how welcome they found it. Many people signed up to come and talk to new deal advisers. It was a successful day. Again, the Government were talking to people at a level that they understand. That is one of several initiatives that have resulted from the new deal for lone parents.

Like many hon. Members, I have had numerous letters from disabled people—people who want to get into work. They want to know what the Government are doing to give them that opportunity. There is an extra cost in employing disabled people. In a previous life, I was a manager with 100 staff, including some disabled people, working for me. I know that it is difficult for such people to get into employment. Counselling and advice are needed. The new deal proposals for disabled people are welcomed by people when one talks to them. As a manager, I would have welcomed many of the initiatives that are being taken. The new deal is coming to fruition. It will be a major success.

The Red Book's title, "New Ambitions for Britain", is ambitious but it is the right title because we are ambitious for our country to succeed and for the people to share in wealth creation and to have an opportunity to contribute to society. The Budget provides many such opportunities. As a result, the country will move in the right direction towards a fairer, more equal society. There is a shift of resources to the least well-off. The Budget shows clearly that hard work will be rewarded but also says that people who are not able to work and who are vulnerable will be looked after. Importantly, it is also a Budget for families and children. It should be welcomed.

7.33 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg). I hope that I pronounced his constituency correctly. As a citizen, I am reassured by his confidence in the current economic stability. In a low voice, I mention that my constituents at Coopers and Lybrand recently issued a report showing that in the past six months, there has developed a greater danger of a hard landing from the present growth pattern and an increasing danger of growth grinding down to zero in 1999. I mention that because welfare to work, to which he alluded, depends on there being jobs for people to go into. If growth disappears, they will not be available.

I did not agree with much of what was said by the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston), but I thank him for reminding me of clauses 47 and 48, which I thought were an imaginative initiative when the Chancellor introduced them. In Mr. Gladstone's words, I hope that these gifts will fructify in the pockets of the people to whom they are being transferred.

As debate on Second Reading can go on until any hour—a fact that must depress you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—there is a temptation, which I have little difficulty in resisting, to embark on a tour d'horizon of the Government's economic policies as exemplified by the provisions of this Finance Bill and the consequences that will flow from them, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) has already done that to great effect. I shall, however, add a brief word before remarking on three aspects of Bill that have particular constituency applications for me.

It is nearly 40 years since I became the *Financial Times* correspondent in Switzerland, which in those far-off days was a part-time position. I was present when the Germans and the Dutch in 1961 revalued their currencies by 5 per cent. Up to that time, there were 12 deutschmarks to the pound and 12 Swiss francs to the pound. It is a great tribute to the productivity of the Swiss and the Germans that they have over the intervening years contrived to live with an exchange rate which until recently had risen fivefold since 1961. The deutschmark is currently worth four times its 1961 value against sterling. They had 37 years in which to accomplish the transition. The current appreciation of the pound has occurred over a much shorter period. I acknowledge that part of it occurred under the previous Government; indeed, I am proud that the markets saluted the policies of the previous Government in that way.

I realise that there is some ambivalence among those on the Treasury Bench about the strength of the pound, but the one certainty is that, at least in this House, whoever is responsible for the strength of the pound, it will not be the Government. Sometimes in their view, it is the responsibility of the Government they succeeded, sometimes of the Bank of England but never, never is it their responsibility, whatever fiscal balance they strike or how. It was said of the treaty of Utrecht that like the peace of God, it passeth all understanding. There are things in

life that I have never understood, such as the parable of the fig tree and Benjamin Jowett's injunction, "Never explain, never apologise." I realise that whichever of Mr. Alastair Campbell or the Minister without Portfolio is Benjamin Jowett's present representative on earth, they do not hold precisely to Jowett's view, but they certainly believe that the Government should apologise only for things that happened a long time ago, such as the potato famine, and that at no time are the Government responsible for anything that goes wrong. We must regard the strong pound as a given, a shoal that we must all negotiate, useful in the interim for inducing a sense of well-being among British tourists abroad. Although the Government wash their hands of it, the rest of the British world has to cope with it.

The recent British Chambers of Commerce report shows exactly how dire are the consequences for manufacturing industry, as several Conservative Members have said. When Campbell's Soups came to Britain, it believed that what was good enough for America was good enough for us. That assumption was upset by British consumers, whose reluctance to consume its tomato soup was annually disguised in the parent company's annual report with the agreeable euphemism

"internationally, our costs continue to exceed our sales."

That is matched by the Treasury's engaging phrase in the Red Book about net trade making a negative contribution to growth through this year and the first half of next. I am reminded of the passage in Robert Graves's "Goodbye to all That", in which Professor Edgeworth, an economist with a polysyllabic tendency, met Lawrence of Arabia in the porch of All Souls and said:

"Was it caliginous in the metropolis today, Lawrence?",

to which Lawrence, in my view to his credit, replied:

"Somewhat caliginous, Edgeworth, but not altogether inspissated."

Through the Treasury's obfuscation, we too can infer that all is not entirely well in our trade figures. That has some relevance to one of my later constituency points.

The irony of the dilemma is that the Government, having put the rural community offside, may now be about to inflict similar damage on some elements of the urban community through manufacturing recession. Of course, the Government will wash their hands of it all. No doubt the President of the Board of Trade will join whatever march emerges, but some of us will remember that the pound would not be as strong as it is if the Government had done more to prevent the application of the Eurofudge to the Maastricht criteria.

Before I leave the rural community, let me say that the Government's emphasis on hydrocarbon oil duties impinges unfairly on that community. We all know the consequences of higher hydrocarbon oil duties for the rural community. I am, however, personally embarrassed that 12 per cent. of cars in London are automatic polluters, whereas only 1 per cent. of those in the borders are. I appreciate that reliability of one's car may be a greater and more necessary virtue in the borders, but it is unjust that people there should be clobbered with taxes to solve a problem that in reality is being created elsewhere.

The first of my constituency points relates to hydrocarbon oil duties, but to something that is not in the Bill rather than something that is. I hope that I shall remain within the rules of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by criticising the thrust of the Bill by means of one of its omissions. The dog that did not bark in the night contributed to the resolution of the disappearance of Silver Blaze in one of Mr. Sherlock Holmes's earliest cases. I refer to the absence of significant further fiscal incentives in the Bill for city diesel or, more technically, low-sulphur diesel. The City of Westminster has a good record in the use of city diesel, which contributed to its recent international award in Madrid as the city that made the greatest contribution to the environment. I am delighted that it has been given participation in the pilot project for random emission tests. However, it and I, and my constituents, would sleep more easily if the Government were reinforcing that policy by encouraging further the use of city diesel.

To echo the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who intervened in the speech of the Chief Secretary, city diesel is plentifully available in the City of Westminster because of the city council's encouragement, but it is not available in the suburbs or out of town, from which so many vehicles set out on journeys into central London. I noticed the Chief Secretary absolve the Government of responsibility for that absence from the forecourts, as indeed he does of so much else. Fiscal incentives affect consumption and consumption affects distribution.

My second constituency point can be briefly put. It alludes to schedule 25. Constituents of mine with distinguished artistic collections on which undertakings have earlier been given under inheritance tax expressed apprehension to me after the Budget about the threatened need to advertise predictable access to what is happily described in the schedule as

"Property of historic interest etc."

I understand the concern about access, but I understand equally the security problems for those who hold such property in a personal capacity rather than as institutions. There was an understandable concern about objects of at least museum quality coming in profusion on to the market at precisely the moment when the Government were curbing the lottery resources of the national heritage memorial fund.

I am not a lawyer, so I do not know whether my constituents who are currently in possession of relevant

"Property of historic interest etc.",

but who are fearful of necessary disposal for security reasons, should feel their anxieties allayed by the wording of each of the last sub-paragraphs of paragraphs 3 to 9 of schedule 25 in terms of property dealt with before the Budget, or whether paragraphs 9 and 10, which refer back to paragraph 8(1), mean that their anxieties will continue. I should be grateful if the Financial Secretary clarified whether all prior property is or is not directly affected by schedule 25 and, if it is, to what extent.

My final constituency point is more immediately substantive, not least as I shall be in Northern Ireland with a Select Committee in the early part of next week and may miss the Committee discussion of clause 11 on the Floor of the House. Clause 11 relates to gaming duty. In consequence, I apologise for treating on it at some length. The justification for the increase in the gaming duty implicit in clause 11 did not fall from the lips of a Minister but came from one of the attendant Budget press releases. It stated that the measure was directed at the larger, more profitable London casinos. My fear is that

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

clause 11 is not effectively concentrated on that target except by the most literal use of language, and that it runs a significant risk of reducing the casino market not only at a cost to the Government's tax revenues but at social risk.

As, for reasons not immediately apparent, the Government uniquely did not consult on this occasion on the change to rates of duty, I hope that the problem is due to misunderstanding of how the industry works and that it is capable of being resolved by disentanglement and discussion. I do not know whether the absence of consultation included the Home Office.

The problem arises as a result of the bulge in the increase in duties imposed, for which I have not so far seen an explanation. At turnover bands of £1 million to £4 million, the tax increase is 29 per cent., 6 per cent., 12 per cent. and 39 per cent. respectively. The bands from £13 million to £20 million see the rate of increase in duty fall steadily and without interruption from 46 per cent. to 34 per cent. respectively. The puzzle is the bands from £5 million to £12 million, where the rate of increase is not consistent, but never falls below 50 per cent. and rises as far as 55 per cent. and 56 per cent. in the bands at £9 million to £11 million. That has the perverse effect that a London casino with a domestic, not international, clientele in my constituency and a turnover of £12 million, can see the gaming duty rise by 50 per cent. but its profitability fall by 80 per cent., which brings its absolute level of profitability down to the same level as that of a provincial casino with a turnover of £2 million, which is hit by an increase of duty of only 6 per cent. as against 50 per cent.

I have on another occasion in this Chamber accused the Government of being anti-London, but even I do not suggest that a blow on this scale was deliberate anti-London malice but rather due to misunderstanding. A casino of which the profitability falls by 80 per cent. on a turnover six times that of a much smaller casino of which the profits barely wobble becomes potentially marginal if the economy turns down, as Coopers and Lybrand has warned us that it may. A fall of 80 per cent. in profitability for reasons outside the casino's control makes a mockery of the Government's enthusiasm for forward planning and investment. In this instance, the closure of a casino of which the customers are indigenous would be wholly due to the tax change, and even this Government could not disclaim that responsibility.

At a time when racing, as we heard earlier this afternoon from my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), is threatened with moving offshore in part as a result of the pattern of racing tax—I can in this instance claim to have been directly in support of my noble Friend Lord Lawson in removing on-course betting duty in 1987—it would be sad if the Government were inadvertently in this instance to damage an industry which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells said, makes so notable a contribution to our balance of payments. Net overseas receipts of £161 million are a remarkable contribution from an industry that employs fewer than 12,000 people.

I do not accuse the Treasury Bench of not realising that a turnover tax can take no account of individual casinos' structural arrangements, nor that in a regulated industry there is no way in which the industry can alter the odds, nor thus that an increase in taxation can be passed on to the punter. I gave an instance of a very domestic casino, but overseas customers are less likely to play if casinos cannot reinvest in their physical stock and ambience. Finally on the background to taxation in this area, I do not accuse the Treasury Bench of not realising that the high rates of gaming duty in other jurisdictions—jurisdictions to which overseas players may decamp—march hand in hand with much more liberal regulation, much greater permitted use of and profits from slot machines, genuinely open-door policies and tips to employees, which are unavailable here, being substituted for British direct payroll costs.

If a casino closes, it is not only the increase in unemployment that concerns me and which, I imagine, would also concern the Government, as even in an area as vigorous as central London we are talking about 4,500 jobs. I foreshadowed my other concern by inquiring earlier as to whether the Home Office had been consulted. The 1968 legislation, which was in part prompted by vicious back-street casinos in the 1960s and which gave us our present pattern of regulation, was contested by my noble Friend Lord Hailsham and Lord Callaghan. The one thing on which they were agreed was that the legislation would be revisited many times in future; the one thing that would have surprised them is that it has scarcely been revisited at all. If casinos start to close as a consequence of the putative duties—on the current figures, I am not being alarmist—the risk of returning to back-street casinos increases, and more sharply if the clientele of the casinos that close are domestic rather than international. I remind the House of the importance of not affording the triads fertile ground on which to feed.

I therefore hope that, as the Bill wends its way through our deliberations, the Government look again at their proposals and the consequential calculations. It may help the Government if I tell them that the industry believes that the Government have underestimated their tax take in the next full year and that, rather than £25 million, they are likely to take £29 million, so there should be some latitude for adjusting the proposals without adversely affecting expected revenues. The industry also believes that, of that £29 million, between £26 million and £27 million will fall on the 21 London casinos and the small balance on the 94 casinos outside London. I have eschewed accusing the Government of an anti-London bias in this instance, but if the Government believe that London casinos are different because of their international clientele, they might like to consider liberalising the casino regime in London in an international direction at a time when overseas earnings are, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells said, of such current importance.

7.51 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I had hoped that this Second Reading debate would be more restrained than the Budget debate, but, listening to the hyperbole of the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) and other Opposition Members, I was reminded of the headlines at the time of the famous giveaway Budget—which, if memory serves, was in 1987—when the then Mr. Nigel Lawson was celebrated in the media as possibly the greatest Chancellor of the Exchequer this century, which really was hyperbole. Sadly, over the past few years, we have had to live with the consequences of those decisions.

Many Opposition Members have tried to console themselves with the hope that the initial popularity of the Budget would soon be replaced by a more critical

judgment along the lines they have set out today—I leave it to others to decide which one of the Opposition lines. That might have been the Conservatives' experience when they were in government, but there is little doubt that this Budget was and continues to be popular and that both economic commentators and the media, including the Tory press, remain stubbornly supportive of it.

It is fairly easy to see why. Inflation, currently at 3 per cent., is set to decline to the target range set for the Monetary Policy Committee by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—2.5 per cent. in 1999. Economic growth in the coming year is likely to be between 2 and 2.5 per cent. and it is set to stay roughly within that range for the next two years, which is at or near the trend and sustainable rate of growth of the British economy. There was an announcement only yesterday that the public sector borrowing requirement was slightly less than £1 billion for the year just ended, which is a substantial reduction on the £5 billion predicted in the Red Book and some £18 billion less than the prediction of the Conservative Government. I feared that that remark would set the Liberal Democrats off on the subject of the election war chest, but we might be spared that as their spokesman, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), is not in the Chamber.

All that is the result not only of buoyant revenues, as the hon. Member for Gordon said, but of the five-year deficit reduction programme introduced in the previous Budget, which had to deal with the so-called golden economic legacy about which we hear so much from Conservative Members. That legacy was an overheating economy, a structural deficit in excess of 2 per cent. of gross domestic product and borrowing of more than £23 billion. The deficit reduction programme has been spectacularly successful, as we heard yesterday.

We learn from the Red Book that we are also now well on the way to fulfilling the golden rule of the economic cycle as set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. With the debt:GDP ratio set to come down to about 47 per cent. by the turn of the century, we can say that we are fulfilling both of the fiscal rules set out by my right hon. Friend in last July's Budget.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Given that the hon. Gentleman is talking about the reduction in the debt:GDP ratio, would he care to comment on the expenditure:GDP ratio and, more important, the tax:GDP ratio? Based on the fairly optimistic growth assumptions in the Red Book, both ratios are likely to be about 40 per cent. next year, which is at or higher than those of most of our main competitors, including Japan and the United States.

Mr. Love: That has been a theme of Conservative arguments. In respect of the economy, the important thing is stability. Above all else, business wants a stable economic climate and that is what the measures in the Budget are designed to achieve.

Stability is critical. We have already established the long-term monetary framework that will maintain low and stable inflation—that was the first step. To further the objective of stability, the Budget introduces a code for fiscal stability, which will enshrine the need for transparency and accountability in Britain's economic policy framework and strengthen the credibility of fiscal and debt management, much as the new monetary policy framework has done for the setting of interest rates. It will be underpinned by detailed reporting arrangements and proper accounting methods.

As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I am pleased that the National Audit Office is to be asked to audit the assumptions and conventions behind the projections, as is did in respect of the July Budget. The code will be put on a statutory basis, which demonstrates the Government's commitment to maintaining and strengthening the credibility of their economic policies.

Important though it is, creating economic stability is not the Budget's only objective, nor is it in some respects the most important. The Budget is emphatically about jobs and families. Its centrepiece is a series of measures to modernise the tax and benefits system, to reward work, to support families and to start the process of reversing the growing inequality in society. In that respect, I welcome the Budget's endorsement of child benefit as one of the pillars of a modern tax and benefits system. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has reaffirmed that child benefit will remain universal and that it will continue to be paid directly to the parent with primary responsibility for the children.

Many low-paid families will also benefit from the introduction of the working families tax credit, and not only because we are turning a benefit into a credit. The working families tax credit will provide more generous help to families through higher thresholds, gentler tapers and—most important—increased child care disregards.

As a result of those changes, the working families tax credit will reach nearly twice as many families as family credit. It is also hoped that take-up will be increased because of the reduced stigma attached to a tax credit. It is more acceptable not only to claimants, but to taxpayers.

In the mid-1980s, the previous Government's extension of family income supplement into family credit increased the take-up from 50 per cent. to 70 per cent. We very much hope that, with a further extension of the working families tax credit and its transformation into a tax credit, take-up will be boosted substantially.

Mr. Gibb: What percentage take-up does the hon. Gentleman believe the Government have used in estimating the cost of the working families tax credit published in the Red Book? I have sought to question the Government on that and have been unable to obtain an answer. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Institute for Fiscal Studies says that if there were 100 per cent. take-up, the cost would be £4 billion a year—not the £200 million the Red Book states? Will he give me the answer that I have tried to get from the Government?

Mr. Love: My answer is that the Government always act on prudent assumptions and only a prudent assumption would be included in the Red Book.

The working families tax credit will make significantly more families better off and, according to table 3.3 in the Red Book, substantially reduce the number of families facing very high marginal rates of tax—above 70 per cent.

Those changes combined will provide a powerful boost to family incomes and help reduce the worst impact of the poverty trap. However, the changes will interact with many other benefits, especially housing benefit, with a taper on all income over income support levels of 65 per cent. That is likely to remain a major barrier to returning

[Mr. Love]

to work. We must look to the comprehensive spending review and subsequent benefit reform to develop the new welfare state further for the 21st century.

Nothing has signalled the change of direction brought about by the election of the Labour Government better than our welfare-to-work proposals to put both the young and the long-term unemployed back to work. In recent months, unease has been expressed by, among others, the Education and Employment Committee, about the lack of support for the long-term unemployed—those over 25 who have been unemployed for more than two years. That problem has been addressed in the Budget, which contains a proposal to provide intensive, individual support similar to that provided for the young through the gateway initiative. It will be targeted at one in three of that long-term group—about 70,000 individuals.

In combination with the weekly subsidy of £75 to employers to employ the long-term unemployed, that additional support will go a long way to meet the needs of this group. Personal support is particularly valuable to the over-50s, who are especially vulnerable. They will receive specific additional back-up support to address the special problems that confront them in the labour market.

The new deal needs new jobs to be successful. Two associated proposals will help to ensure the creation of some of them. The cut in corporation tax for small and medium enterprises and the extension of last year's capital allowances will improve their cash flow and help them to grow. In addition, the national insurance changes for employers will raise the lower earnings limit and replace banding with a single rate. At no extra cost to employers, those changes will harmonise national insurance with the tax system and decrease the burden on companies of their lower-paid employees. We hope that the changes will allow more people both from the unemployment register and from the new deal to take up employment.

I give a resounding welcome to a small initiative that, in many ways, reflects the fresh priorities of the new Government. The recent White Paper on international development has given a strong lead on the present Government's policy toward the developing countries of the third world. The Chancellor's initiative, returning up to £40 for every £100 donated from private sources, provides support to individuals throughout the country who want to contribute to the relief of third-world poverty and inequality. I hope that the tax concession will be an opportunity for the people of this country to show their support and solidarity for empowering third-world countries to find their own way to a better and more productive future.

The Government were elected on a pledge to improve our public services. That was especially true in the case of education and health; the improvement of those vital services will be a measure of our success as a Government. Although substantial additional funds were made available in the July 1997 Budget, it is widely recognised that more needs to be done. Part of that is already happening, through savings and changes in priorities, especially in health, and much is expected from the comprehensive spending review. However, the needs of those services have been recognised in this Budget.

The Budget provides £500 million to add to the £1½ billion for health to be spent directly on reducing waiting lists. I welcome the commitment to get waiting lists on a downward trend in the coming year. An extra £250 million has also been made available for education. Including that amount, £2½ billion has been provided for education since the Government came to office. That includes £1.3 billion for investment in school dwellings and equipment during the next five years.

The Government are as prudent as one would expect, given who the Chancellor is. In recognition of the reduced PSBR for last year, a substantial amount will be placed in reserve in the coming year.

As the Red Book says, the Budget sets out new ambitions for Britain. The Budget encourages work, supports families and will modernise the welfare state. It will encourage a fairer society in which all can share in higher living standards and greater job opportunities. I commend it to the House.

8.7 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Some weeks ago, I was lucky to have a few minutes in hand, and I popped into an exhibition in Horse Guards parade called powerhouse::uk. Tonight there has been some quibbling over the extent of the golden legacy of the previous Government, but anyone who went to the powerhouse::uk exhibition could not fail to note that the dates on every exhibit, almost without exception, pre-dated 1 May 1997. It was charitable, if unintentionally so, of the new Government to produce such a showpiece, such a monument, to the achievement of enterprise in this country under the Conservative Government.

Today, as I passed Horse Guards parade, I could not help noticing that the exhibition was being dismantled. I very much fear that, just as the present Government are dismantling that showpiece of Conservative achievement, they are dismantling, through the Budget and the Treasury team's policies, the real achievements of the real economy under the previous Government.

This week, we had another example of that achievement in my constituency, when a Queen's award for technological achievement was given for satellite systems based at the university of Surrey—an extraordinary but, in many ways, typical example of the enterprise and imagination shown by people in this country under the previous Government. We are talking about a tremendous success story: British innovation has cut the cost of launching micro-satellites, with the result that there are now in space at least 12 such satellites, at a cost of more than $2 million each, all financed by private sector customers of Surrey university, which developed the technology to launch them into space. That is a tremendous achievement for a British business in a British university.

On the same day, Sibert Instruments Ltd., another firm in my constituency, won a Queen's award for exports. It, like the many other high value added manufacturing businesses in my constituency, is worried about the high level of sterling.

I want to add three points to those already well made by my right hon. and hon. Friends, to hammer home the fact that it is the Government's policies that have inflicted on manufacturing industry a far higher exchange rate—an uncompetitive exchange rate vis-à-vis the rest of Europe.

The Government are guilty of a failure of monetary tactics. Let us not forget that at the same time as the Chancellor gave putative independence to the Bank of

England, he raised interest rates by one quarter of one percentage point. It was the Chancellor—not the Bank—who set in train an incremental approach to raising interest rates. It is now evident, as it was to many of us who said so at the time, that what the economy demanded last summer was not an incremental but a decisive approach to adjusting monetary policy.

Any change in monetary policy has a two-pronged effect. First, it has an effect on the exchange markets, and, in economic terms, the exchange markets' reaction to adjustments in monetary policy is elastic. The exchange markets anticipate what may happen after the first move, thinking forward to further interest rate moves and calculating that, at that point, they can buy the pound against other currencies and profit from higher interest rates against a background of rising interest rates. It was such a speculative calculation which drove up sterling after May last year.

Mr. Derek Twigg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. St. Aubyn: I shall give way when I have completed my point.

The second prong to monetary policy is the effect on the domestic consumer, who reacts in what economists would call an inelastic way to changes in monetary policy. The new Chancellor said that he was giving the Bank of England independence and that monetary policy would be conducted differently in future. The British consumer would last year have been entitled to assume that the Bank had decided that a 0.25 per cent. change in interest rates was enough, and that, if that was what was required, that was what the British consumer would get. That is the type of adjustment that consumers were led by the Government to expect.

Mr. Twigg *rose—*

Mr. St. Aubyn: I shall not give way until I have finished making this point.

On both fronts, the Government gave out the wrong signal. They gave out a signal which drove up sterling but at the same time gave out a signal to domestic consumers which failed to constrain consumption.

Mr. Twigg: Would the hon. Gentleman care to share with us the number of occasions on which the previous Government put up interest rates?

Mr. St. Aubyn: The previous Government not only put up interest rates; they reduced them, as they reduced inflation. We inherited a rate of inflation of 16 per cent.; we bequeathed one of 2.5 per cent.

Mr. Ruffley: Did not my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) succeed by 1997 in bringing interest rates down to their lowest level since we won the World cup in 1966?

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his knowledge of football as well as economics. He makes a valid point.

We have had a bit of badinage this evening about whether interest rates should have risen before the election. I am sure that any economist would agree that the period leading up to an election is one of uncertainty which, of itself, restrains investment decisions. In the months before an election—we saw this before the 1992 election as well—a different monetary policy is required from that which is required after the dramatic event, as it always is, of an election result.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) said that I was arguing that it was a good thing that we had a large Labour majority. I was not arguing that. I was arguing that it is a good thing that, by and large, our system of government delivers a decisive election result. Hon. Members should pause long and hard before agreeing to deviate to any other system which would not in future continue to deliver decisive political results following general elections, which at least ensure, even when we do not agree with them, that we can presume to know what the Government's policy will be.

As well as the failure of monetary tactics, we also saw from the new Government a failure of fiscal strategy. It was the Chancellor who chose to introduce a second Budget in the same year, a Budget which put up many duties and, with them, the rate of inflation. Having just transferred the control of interest rates to the Bank of England, and having given a firm injunction as to the inflation target, the Chancellor forced up the rate of inflation and, literally, by those decisions, forced up the level of interest rates needed to give the monetary policy of the newly independent Bank of England any sense of credibility.

It was a failure of fiscal strategy, forcing up the duties, forcing up the inflation rate, that compounded the problem, pushing up interest rates even further, and again hammering our exporters with a rising pound.

As has been said, there was also the failure in that Budget—continued, I regret to say, in this Budget—of savings policy. At a moment when windfalls were accruing to British consumers from the demutualisation of the building societies, and when every effort should have been made to encourage them to invest and save their money, the new Government attacked the most popular and successful form of saving that Britain has known—its pension funds. The pensions tax was a direct attack on saving and sent consumers the message that they are better off spending their money than saving it. If they go into long-term saving schemes, they never know when the new Government might come along and change the rules, taking some of those savings from them.

We also heard a debate about whether the Government had, by that move, tightened policy. In the long run, if people's savings are attacked—everyone has to save for their retirement—they are obliged to put more of their hard-earned income into savings. Therefore, in the long run, one achieves some element of fiscal tightening. But in the short run, one simply takes money from savings in Britain and accrues it to the Government in a confiscation of savings the like of which we have not seen since the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Derek Twigg: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's concern for pension funds. Will he comment on the mis-selling of pensions and say how the record number of house repossessions under the previous Government helped people to save?

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding us that the problems of pensions mis-selling

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

were as nothing compared with the Government's election manifesto mis-selling on pensions and PEPs. Although individual savings accounts would have been much worse without the strenuous efforts of Conservative Members and without the campaigning that took place, the system introduced in the Budget is worse than PEPs and TESSAs because it is more restrictive. Treasury Ministers say that they are targeting the new savings vehicle at the less well-off: they should think harder about how jobs in manufacturing industry could be saved before handing out carrots to people to save money. People are unable to save anything when they have lost their jobs; indeed, they have to draw on their savings to survive. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) appears to want me to give way again, but I have had enough and he spoke at length earlier.

I met a Labour voter in my constituency recently—there are a few in the Guildford area—who was putting up a fence in my garden, for the safety of my children. He told me that the Conservatives needed a rest after 18 years in government but that, although he was delighted by the result of the election, he was disgusted by the five interest rate increases which he had suffered under the new Labour Government. They were not what he had expected when he helped to put them into power.

The Government thought that they would escape responsibility by the sleight of hand of making it appear that the Bank of England is taking the decisions, but they have earned the contempt of the people of this country by their actions. If they had acted decisively, they would have deserved respect. That is the difference between their actions and those of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and his predecessors.

This is a rag-bag of a Finance Bill and whether one comes out of it better or worse is a lottery. One person has come out much worse—the Paymaster General. I am told that when members of the Law Society were asked for advice on offshore trusts, they sat around a table and said, "We can all agree on one thing: whatever else comes out of the proposals, they must hit Robinson."

Mr. Ruffley: Where is the Paymaster General? Where is Geoff?

Mr. St. Aubyn: Indeed, where is the hon. Gentleman? In time, the Bill may become known as the Robinson Bill.

The arbitrary nature of much of the Bill is what is most objectionable about it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) mentioned the arbitrary nature of the corporation tax clauses, and arbitrary clauses relate to personal portfolio bonds, an obscure area of the law. Nevertheless, clause 87 contains a dangerous principle, because the manner in which and rate at which such savings vehicles may be taxed does not have to be considered by the House.

It is a fundamental principle of the House that proposals to tax members of our society should be debated by hon. Members, but the Government propose in clause 87 that they should have the power to set any rate of tax at any time—retrospectively, if they want to—and in such manner as they choose. The clause is a disgraceful one which hon. Members with a conscience about their duties in this House must surely oppose.

There has been another sleight of hand over encouraging investment. We have heard that the Budget encourages long-term investment. The rules, as they affect small, non-traded companies, have been changed for the worse. Many people who invested in companies on the alternative investment market in the belief that they would receive the benefits of that market will find that companies quoted on it will be excluded from the future enterprise investment scheme. The healthy demand from a wide group of people for shares on that market will disappear, and its liquidity will suffer. The value of shares will fall as a result of the Government's detrimental change to the treatment of small quoted companies' shares and the application of the enterprise investment scheme.

The Government are not encouraging long-term investment. Their broader rules on tapering relief are encouraging speculative investment. A person who puts £1,000 into a speculative so-called hedge fund in 1998 and holds it for 10 years before selling it will pay a far lower tax bill than under the old rules, assuming that the hedge fund speculates successfully. On the other hand, if that person invests in a conservative asset the growth in value of which merely tracks the rate of inflation, tax may be levied on between 10 and 24 per cent. of the notional gain, which is no gain at all in real terms. Under the old rules, he would have no tax to pay when he sold the asset. We are back to the old confiscatory regime of capital gains tax, which we inherited and which was eliminated by the former hon. Member for Blaby, Nigel Lawson.

A great many things are wrong with the Bill. First and foremost is the contrast with the problems that Government policy is creating for businesses, especially those in the manufacturing sector. Labour Members' rhetoric suggests that they are losing touch with their constituents and with the real needs of business.

Ms Moran: The hon. Gentleman has waxed lyrical about the previous Government's encouragement of enterprise among small businesses. How does he reconcile his comments with the fact that, on average, three small businesses went bust every working day in the last four years of the Conservative Administration?

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Lady does not appear to realise that a proportion of new small businesses do not work. Under any regime, a number will fail, but the number of failures went down dramatically in the last five years of Conservative government, to the point at which receiverships and bankruptcies were the lowest that they had been for a long time. I shall not take any notice of the hon. Lady's remarks on business failures. The previous Government had financial success and they bequeathed a golden inheritance. This Government do not realise the damage that they are doing by unpicking all that good work.

8.28 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): The Budget was a Budget for spinners and was not all that it seemed. Conservative Members are delighted to have the opportunity to delve into the detail on Second Reading and we will do the same in Committee because, with the Government's proposals, the devil is always in the detail.

After the pre-Budget statement in the autumn, there were some rather pernicious proposals relating to ISAs, the Government's proposed new savings vehicle.

We carried out a detailed analysis of the proposals and mounted a skilled offensive, which resulted in a Government U-turn. We are glad to see the fruits of our campaign on ISAs encapsulated in the Bill. As we go through the Bill line by line, we shall see many more instances of the Government not thinking through the proposals that they are asking the House to approve.

I should like to focus on the clauses dealing with fiscal stability. In the debate, there has been a great deal of new Labour rhetoric—standard, robotic Back-Bench comments about prudence, stability and fiscal credibility. Labour Members should have regard to the sorry state of affairs attending the representation in the Red Book of tax revenue and receipts. Treasury Ministers have decided to score tax credits, primarily working families tax credits, as negative tax revenue. Those of us who speak to business people and those in the City, and who have some experience of commercial and financial affairs, know that that is nothing but a shabby trick—a ruse—to massage down the tax burden in the Red Book.

Why did Treasury Ministers who were preparing the Red Book figures to be published on Budget day not wait for the decision by the Office for National Statistics on whether income tax credits should be scored as negative tax revenue? As I have said, we think that it was an attempt to massage down the tax burden. Why did the Financial Secretary not wait for the independent decision by the ONS? We await with bated breath the hon. Lady's response, and I trust that she will give a full and frank explanation of what to us and to City practitioners was nothing more than a fiddling of the figures and dodgy accountancy practice.

That is not the end of the story about the scoring of working families tax credits. Ministers did not even get that right in the Red Book because on 27 March, the Financial Secretary had to give a Labour Member a written answer, and column *348* shows that tables B5, B8, B9 and B24 had to be completely recast. In her written answer, the hon. Lady rather disingenuously said that these were "minor errors". The key minor error related to the fact that in the Red Book, the Chancellor said that for the financial year 2002-03, the share of national income accounted for by income tax credits was 0.3 per cent. of GDP. The hon. Lady had to recalculate the figure for her reply of 27 March and it went up to 0.8 per cent. of GDP. Some minor error! Cumulatively and in nominal terms, it was an error of £15 billion. That is an index of the incompetence and the shabby methods of calculation of these so-called fiscally prudent Treasury Ministers. It was a disgrace, and in her winding-up speech, the hon. Lady should explain why that error occurred.

In the end, the Government managed to get one item right. As a result of the way in whey they have scored income tax credits, they have, according to the Financial Secretary's revised answer, brought down the national tax burden as a share of GDP to 37.8 per cent. compared with the 38.5 per cent. that they originally advertised in the Red Book. Perhaps for the Financial Secretary, all's well that ends well. That is new Labour, new accountancy. It is very much in the Robert Maxwell school of creative accounting.

Sadly, the Economic Secretary and the Paymaster General are not in their places. They both worked for the late Robert Maxwell and his dodgy accountancy seems to have rubbed off on them. They are practising these dark arts in the Treasury. They will not wash, and they do not carry any credibility. It is a pathetic joke for Labour Members to parrot the rhetoric of prudence and responsibility when the Government cannot even get basic figures about tax receipts and revenues right and, on Budget day, give the House the correct figures. The House is owed an explanation. I have posed two questions on that technical issue, and I hope that the Financial Secretary will have the good grace to respond to them in detail.

The final issue that I wish to raise is the Government's credibility on tax. I have already described their shambolic accountancy and number crunching in the Red Book, and in subsequent revisions. What about the misleading impressions that the Government gave the electorate before Budget day? Labour Members may not like to be reminded of some of the false impressions that they gave the electorate before Labour came to office. The hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) made great play of the fact that Labour promised not to increase marginal rates of income tax. We do not dispute that Labour said that, but it went further, as the quotations that I have to hand admirably prove. Labour clearly gave the British people the impression that there would be no unnecessary tax increases.

Perhaps the Financial Secretary could respond to the following question with a straight yes or no. On 8 January 1997, did the Prime Minister, then the Leader of the Opposition, say:

"Look, I am not going into the election with anybody saying there is any hidden agenda anywhere. There are no tax increases implied by the programme"?

He was speaking not about rates, but about tax increases, and we have had a bellyful of tax increases not only in this Budget, but in the one before it. I await the hon. Lady's reply to my question.

The Budget is a tale of woe for the average family. The Library was asked to calculate the cost to an average household of tax and mortgage increases since Labour came to power. These are House of Commons figures. The calculations were based on a typical family, which is sensibly defined as containing a single earner with a non-working partner, two children, a car, a personal pension and an outstanding mortgage of about £40,000, which is the national average.

As a result of the economic policies that have been put into effect by the Labour party, that average family is £1,000 per annum worse off: so much for Labour's posturing about helping ordinary people. We are talking about a married man on average earnings. I should be grateful if the Financial Secretary could tell Conservative Members whether the House of Commons Library is wrong. Has it made faulty assumptions? Has it failed to add up properly?

Perhaps I could assist the Financial Secretary with some numbers because she obviously has difficulty, with her officials, in adding up properly when it comes to scoring tax receipts and credits relating thereto. The mortgage rate changes have added some £400 a year to the average mortgage. As a result of advance corporation tax changes, the pension contributions of the average single earner in the typical household that I have described have increased by £20 a month.

We have a council tax increase which, even on conservative estimates, for band D properties is £60 per annum, and we have the tax changes, the most scandalous

[Mr. David Ruffley]

of which are the cut in the married couple's allowance—slashed by a third in the Budget—and the petrol tax increases. Not only has there been an increase in the percentage in the escalator, but the timing of the increases has been brought forward in such a way that car drivers pay 38p more per gallon as a result of the Government's policies since 1 May.

We have had some elegant and technically well-informed analyses of the effect that the corporate taxation that has been introduced by the Government has had on British business. I will not repeat some of the points that have been made in excellent contributions by my hon. Friends, but it remains the case that £20 billion extra will be levied on business during this Parliament because of the Government's measures. There is no getting away from the fact that the words of Professor John Kay and Mervyn King in their classic text on the British tax system remain as true today as ever:

"There is no such thing as a tax on firms; the effective incidence of all taxes is ultimately on individuals".

The average family that I have described is £1,000 worse off; we can demonstrate that clearly. Over the medium and long term, the effects on business will also have an impact on those families; their living standards will drop and they will be worse off.

This is a bad Budget. It is a bad Bill and I shall have the greatest pleasure in giving moral and any other support that I can to my hon. Friends, who will take this Bill apart clause by clause.

8.42 pm

Ms Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I particularly welcome the opportunity to follow the previous two hon. Members who have spoken. When Napoleon said that Britain was a nation of shopkeepers, he was trying to imply small-mindedness and he was wrong; it was not the only thing that he was wrong about. However, I suspect that he has something in common with the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) in that he knew very little about small business in Britain.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Southworth: No. I have only just begun.

Small and medium businesses are dynamic. They are the drivers of the economy. They are entrepreneurs and close to the action.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not a convention of the House that, if an hon. Member is named by another hon. Member, he should be allowed to reply?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): The hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) chose not to give way and she was perfectly in order to do so. She has only just started her speech.

Ms Southworth: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As Labour Members know, small and medium businesses are key players in industry and commerce. They are the drivers of the economy and provide 46 per cent. of non-Government employment. More than that, they often use their skills in the community not just to improve the competitiveness of their local economies, but, in a range of social sectors, to contribute significantly in education, the health service and the voluntary sector.

In my constituency of Warrington, South, people have developed effective partnerships between local government and the private sector over a number of years, working co-operatively to considerable effect to improve the local economy, so that Warrington is becoming a boom town. They are developing a supportive infrastructure, which means that we have managed to overcome the boom and bust that the previous Government thrust on small businesses throughout the country, resulting in some of the problems that were mentioned by Conservative Members earlier.

Small business people look forward to and welcome a relationship with the national Government and a dialogue that recognises complementary roles. They look forward to working together to create stable economic development, which enhances social cohesion. Those things are important. I recognise that small businesses and small business people are effective in our local economy and local society. I respect them for that, work closely with them and intend to continue to do so over many years in government.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Would the hon. Lady, therefore, like to reflect on the changes in the capital gains tax regime, which will have a significant effect on small business men who plan to retire in the next few years? Will the dialogue of which she has spoken extend to a dialogue with them and with the Government to bring about a change in the regime that has been announced?

Ms Southworth: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will listen to the rest of the things that I have to say. I am sure that he will listen with interest to the things that both I and my constituents, the entrepreneurs of whom I have been speaking and who welcome many aspects of the Budget, are saying. That particular aspect—listening—is important. I know that it is something that Labour Members recognise to be important. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] I am not entirely sure about Conservative Members, but I know that in my constituency, small businesses are saying clearly to me, and I take it clearly to—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want so many interruptions. The hon. Lady is in good order and no one should be out of order by adding comments from a sedentary position.

Ms Southworth: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, dialogue is important and the Government recognise dialogue with local businesses. I am pleased to be able to report that discussions that I held before and after the Budget with small and medium businesses in my constituency bring good news. Those local small businesses recognise that the Government are working for and with them, and that the Bill will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of their businesses.

The key issues for local small and medium businesses, which they tell me about, which I listen to and which the Government listen to, are that they want economic

stability and prudence—something which some Conservative Members were laughing about earlier—a stable economy and customers with money in their pockets, all things that the Bill is bringing forward. They want to survive and thrive and, working with this Government, that is going to happen.

Those businesses made clear comments on the new deal, recognising that there is a skills gap. Earlier, Conservative Members talked about the destruction of manufacturing industry. We remember that clearly. We remember what happened when the Opposition were in government. We saw manufacturing, certainly in the north-west, destroyed and taken apart. Skills and opportunities were lost and businesses were closing by the minute. The Government are having to rebuild from that position, but we are taking on that responsibility and taking action that will rebuild business in Britain.

Small businesses welcome the new deal because it is giving them an opportunity to develop skills. More than that, big businesses also recognise that they have a role to play in the development of a skilled work force and that they have to support small businesses. Only last week, I was talking to one of the senior directors of a building company who referred to the crucial need for him to support trades people in their development of skills so that small businesses would have a pool of labour to employ and he could make his own business more effective.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Lady accused me of knowing nothing about small business. I run a small business in the construction sector and we were helping people to develop their skills in that sector for years before the Government came on the scene.

Ms Southworth: I am so impressed, but I am saddened that those skills were not used when the Conservative party was in government because if they had been, the building industry might be in a far better state than it is now.

Small businesses in my constituency and other small businesses to which I have spoken value the joined-up thinking of the Government and welcome the co-ordinated action that the Bill demonstrates. They also welcome the fact that it demonstrates support for the social aspects of the new deal across Government Departments.

Another important and interesting aspect of the dialogue with businesses is that they tell me how bitterly disappointed they were that 50 per cent. of 11-year-olds entering secondary schools were without basic standards in the three Rs. Small businesses said that they had to take on employees without basic literacy skills and felt that they should not have to compensate for the poor educational standards of the previous Government. They and the Government recognise that there is a cost to local employers if employees do not have basic skills.

The research and development proposals in the Bill are working actively to reverse the trend of recent years in which civil R and D spending has been reduced as a proportion of GDP year on year. I welcome the Government's proposals to increase investment in R and D and, equally importantly, to ensure that research results are exploited effectively so that nationally, we gain the economic benefit of our intelligence and skills.

Coming from Warrington, I am pleased that we are working hard to encourage the formation and growth of small high-tech companies. That is demonstrated by the Budget announcement of the £50 million venture capital fund for universities. Other significant points for my constituency include the removal of the barriers to growth—the regulatory burdens that we are cutting—the fact that we are giving better and more co-ordinated advice to small businesses, the tax and national insurance co-ordination, the payroll services we are offering and the experimental call centre at East Kilbride. This Government, together with small businesses, recognise that customers should be served effectively if we are to succeed. We are ensuring that the Government are servicing our small business customers.

I talked about dialogue and I want to discuss with the House the ballot of the Forum of Private Business on the 1997 Budget. Its members were balloted and asked a series of specific questions, and their verdict was that the overall Government handling of the economy and of non-tax issues was positive and that the impact on tax issues was neutral.

I further want to bring to the House the comments of the Federation of Small Businesses and its reaction to the 1998 Budget. *[Interruption.]* The FSB policy unit chairman, Brian Prime, said:

"The Chancellor has delivered a Budget for both employers, employees and consumers."

[Interruption.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I will not tolerate private discussions in the Chamber. If hon. Members want to enter into private discussions, they can do so outside.

Ms Southworth: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Federation of Small Businesses would be interested to learn that Conservative Members chose to have a private chat rather than listen to its views.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Southworth: No.

As I was saying, the policy unit chairman said:

"The Chancellor has delivered a Budget for both employers, employees and consumers. Small businesses with long-term investments will benefit, more people will be encouraged into the jobs market and at the same time consumers will have more money in their pocket."

That is precisely what the small businesses in my constituency were asking this Government to provide before the Budget.

The Forum of Private Business talked about what it considered to be "significant progress" in the 1998 Budget, which included:

"Integration of the administration of income tax (PAYE) and national insurance by transferring the Contributions Agency . . . from the Department of Social Security to the Inland Revenue.

Simplification of capital gains tax through the introduction of a tapered regime (endorsed by members in Referendum 133)

Reductions in corporation tax rates.

Continuation of the enhanced first-year capital relief at 40 per cent.

Measures to encourage and reward work including reducing NI costs at the lower pay scales and a move to a single rate of NI which should be simpler to administer."

It said that they were all significant measures.

[Ms Southworth]

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to bring to the House the things that small businesses in my constituency and throughout the country have been saying about the Bill. I would have been happy had Conservative Members been prepared to listen to those things because it would have been better for the country. However, I am happy to know that the Government listen and take action, and intend to be in office for many years so that the country will benefit and small businesses can continue to participate in partnership with local government and national Government.

8.56 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I spoke briefly in the Budget debate, and expressed my views on the broad shape of the Budget. There are many things within it that are entirely to the Government's credit, but there are other things with which I disagree, and some with which I profoundly disagree. Ministers will not be surprised to hear me say that.

The specific areas of disagreement largely fall outside the scope of the debate, in that they are concerned mainly with expenditure rather than income. I am sure that I would be ruled out of order if I dwelt on the fact that I see little benefit from the Budget in the county of Somerset in terms of the provisions on which we rely to educate our children, and to provide a health service and all the other services that people expect.

My only comment on that—it would be otiose to repeat the comments that I made previously—is to refer to the intervention by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), who is not in his place at the moment and who was kind enough to ignore my existence earlier in the debate. He mentioned clause 152 and the provision in the Bill for the National Audit Office to provide an assessment of the assumptions that underlie Budget expenditure.

Would it not be a good idea if the Audit Commission—I confess my murky past as a member of that body in a previous existence—were to assess the effectiveness of the Government's budgetary measures in providing an even service for local authorities and the health service? Such an audit might show up the inequalities in provision that exist across the country, and the areas that are badly treated by present Government policy.

I also draw attention to the difficulties that the increase in petrol duty will cause to a great many residents in my constituency without the important counter-balance of reform to vehicle excise duty. It would have been so much better had the Government introduced concrete proposals to reform vehicle excise duty at the same time as they increased the petrol tax.

Similarly, the best single measure for small businesses—certainly in my constituency—would be for the uniform business rate to be replaced by a fairer and locally administered alternative. We have not seen the progress that I had hoped the Government would make in that area.

I base the main thrust of my speech on clause 2, particularly subsection (3), which deals with the rate of duty on sparkling cider. As I am a Somerset Member, it may not be surprising that I wish to talk about cider. Indeed, a number of my constituents would be happy were I to propose the abolition of duty on cider. There was a time, in my youth, when cider carried no duty. It was half a crown a gallon. The Chancellor of the Exchequer did not consider it worthy of his attention; what is more, the health inspectors did not consider it worthy of their attention either, and a much better drink it was for those reasons.

I am concerned about a category of cider that is seriously affected by the Bill—bottle-fermented cider. I do not think that the Government intended that. I am not taking a populist line, because few people in Somerset drink it. It is a niche product, and there is not a vast employment consequence. It is affected by the increase in duty on sparkling ciders and the reduction in duty on sparkling wines.

The Government's rationale for what they doing is that there have been complaints from the Italian Government and the European Commission that certain alcoholic beverages made from apples and pears are being sold as Italian sparkling wines. I do not know why anyone should counterfeit Italian sparkling wines, but such an industry has developed.

Because the European Commission upheld the Italian Government's complaint, the Conservative Government introduced a separate category of sparkling ciders in their Budget two years ago. There have been increases in duty to make a uniform duty framework for the two products, and sparkling cider carries 100 per cent. more duty than normal cider.

Mr. Fallon: Does that mean that, on this issue at least, the hon. Gentleman is deviating slightly from the Liberal Democrat policy of European tax harmonisation?

Mr. Heath: Let me be clear that what we are talking about is harmonisation within this country of two totally disparate products. If the hon. Gentleman listens a little further, he will find out what I mean.

The proposal will not have the desired effect—that is the tragedy. Bottle-fermented sparkling cider, a craft product, will carry 100 per cent. more duty than ordinary cider, and by next year, if the Government's suggestion is carried through, it will carry 200 per cent. more duty than its commercially produced equivalent. We are talking about a craft product that is consumed by few people. It is made in the old-fashioned way on a few farms in my constituency and elsewhere. It employs relatively few people.

The difficulty is with the products that pretend to be lambrusco. I am told that there is a product made in the north of England called lambrini bianco. It is a sparkling perry, and has a picture of Venice on the label to convince people that it is a lambrusco from Italy, although it is in fact a lambrini from Liverpool. The Government have gone to great lengths to change the duty because they are so concerned about this disastrous situation. Unfortunately, they do not seem to have read the fine print of the regulation from Customs and Excise.

The Customs and Excise regulation resulting from the 1996 Budget provides for a separate rate of duty for

"sparkling cider and perry defined as exceeding 5.5 per cent. alcohol by volume (abv) but less than 8.5 per cent. abv which is contained in bottles with 'mushroom stoppers' held in place by ties or fastening, or which has an excess pressure due to carbon dioxide solution of three bar or more."

I know that all hon. Members are aware of that, and they will also recognise that lambrini bianco does not fall into that category. It will carry exactly the same duty as before, because it has a pressure of less than one bar, and so will continue to be a counterfeit Italian wine. The only people who will suffer are those making traditional Somerset cider that is bottled and fermented and sold at only a few outlets across the country.

What will the net revenue effect be? The Minister has estimated that there will be £5 million less duty as a result of the reduction in the duty on sparkling wine, but the increase in duty on the bottle-fermented cider will be about £200 or £300—certainly less than £1,000. People are being put out of business for that small sum. I do not believe that that was the Government's intention. I believe that it is a mistake, and that Customs and Excise has given grossly misleading information.

If the committal motion is agreed later this evening, we shall not have the opportunity to debate this important matter on the Floor of the House, so I must make my point now. I do so on behalf of very few people, but I hope that the Financial Secretary will look at the matter again, and be able to tell me on Report that she has regularised the position so that people like my constituent Mr. Julian Temperley, who makes an exceedingly good cider in Kingsbury Episcopi, will be satisfied that the Government have listened to the small battalions as well as the big ones, and that such people will be able to continue to make their product.

This has nothing to do with Taunton, Bulmer or any of the big producers, which do not make cider in the category in question. I am talking about a few farmers who make a specialist product, whose voice should be heard.

9.7 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to follow the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). My speech will range a little wider than his.

As I said in my speech on 18 March at column 1341 of *Hansard*, there was considerable disappointment after the Budget, because the pound immediately strengthened to a nine-year high, and now stands at almost $1.7 and more than DM3. Larger manufacturers in particular will simply transfer their production to lower-cost centres elsewhere in the world, which means that we are exporting jobs. No socialist Government have ever left office with unemployment lower than when they took office, and I predict that this Labour Government will be no exception.

There is another unfortunate effect of a high pound. If it remains high—at more than DM3—for 15 days preceding 5 May, the green pound will have to be revalued yet again, putting further pressure on our already overburdened farmers. Farmers will find that the support they receive from Europe is suddenly reduced because of the revaluation of the green pound.

Let me refer to a matter that was addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn)—the very wide powers that clause 87 gives the Treasury under secondary legislation. This Finance Bill confers some of the widest secondary powers conferred by any Finance Bill.

I refer particularly to clause 158, which provides the enacting legislation to prepare for European monetary union. Subsection (4) reads as follows:

"The power to make regulations under this section includes—

(a) power to impose charges to taxation;

(b) power to amend or repeal any enactment; and

(c) power to make such incidental, supplemental, consequential and transitional provision as appears to the Treasury to be appropriate."

In one Bill, Henry VIII transferred the whole religious status of this country—

Mr. Swayne: Rightly so.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am not sure about that, and nor were subsequent generations. My hon. Friend makes an interesting sedentary contribution to my peroration.

I understood that the House was based on a money-granting provision. That was the reason for the Parliament Acts earlier this century, and it is why only this House can pass financial legislation.

Paragraph 15 of the explanation of clause 158 that the Government have kindly provided states:

"The breadth of the enabling power also means the Government will be able to remove any further specific obstacles arising from the introduction of the single currency which businesses may identify later in the run-up to EMU."

The Bill is an utter disgrace, because it completely ignores Parliament. The sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom is being marginalised in a way that I have not seen since I entered the House.

Mr. Grieve: I was trying to find the correct way of putting it, but does my hon. Friend agree that, like Henry VIII's legislation, the Bill is arbitrary, tyrannical and lacking in sensitivity—precisely what the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) seemed to believe that this caring, sharing Government were all about?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I hear what my hon. Friend says.

The Prime Minister may consider himself president-elect and world peacemaker extraordinary, but he is ignoring Parliament. He is presiding over an increasingly presidential regime that Labour Members may have cause to regret. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, so that is what will happen to the Prime Minister.

After a sustained campaign by my right hon. and hon. Friends, we managed to persuade the Government to listen to the hundreds of thousands of small savers, and not abolish PEPs and TESSAs.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): Opposition Members have made great play of the fact that they have managed to effect those changes. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the forceful points that made the Government change their mind was the fact that many women have PEPs pensions because of the nature of their earnings pattern? Does he also accept that the disgraceful antics of himself and his colleagues during the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) will make absolutely sure that the faith of many women in the Opposition's ability to listen, let alone act in their interests, is roughly zilch?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that speech, which purported to be an intervention.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

However, she made an interesting point. Small savers who are saving for their old age will be hit by the phasing out of PEPs and TESSAs.

Mr. Swayne: Women among them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) must behave himself.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will not listen to my hon. Friend any more.

I was referring to the curtailment of PEPs and TESSAs, combined with the abolition of ACT and the increase in national insurance. Effectively, that will reduce savings—particularly of those who are saving to buy a house, or those saving for nursing or residential care in their old age. It will make vulnerable old people increasingly dependent on the state.

The previous Conservative regime encouraged people to take out their own personal pension, so that 50 per cent. of all people retiring now have some form of personal pension. That is the route we ought to be encouraging people to go down, so that, when they retire, they can be independent and make their own choices, and not rely on the state. Chart A3 on page 90 of the Red Book makes it clear that the savings ratio went down by 1 per cent. last year, and will go down again this year. That is not healthy for this country.

I mentioned national insurance, and I wish to refer to what I believe to be a flaw in the Bill. I will be grateful if the Financial Secretary could look at this matter before she replies. In his Budget speech, the Chancellor said:

"Further reforms will ensure that no one pays national insurance for the first £81 of their weekly earnings."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1106.]

However, paragraph 3.31 of the Red Book says:

"The lower earnings limit for employees will remain unchanged (at £64 in 1998-99.)"

Clearly, the two statements cannot be correct. I have looked to try to find whether the Bill addresses that anomaly, but I cannot see whether it does or not. I should be grateful for an explanation.

I have listened carefully to the debate—including the speech of the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth)—and I have heard Labour Members say nothing about stamp duty. Like insurance premium tax, stamp duty was set at a relatively low rate, and did not deter anyone from their normal behaviour—in the case of stamp duty, from purchasing or selling property. When the rate was 0.5 or 1 per cent, that situation applied. Now, there have been serious increases. For the band between £250,000 and £500,000, stamp duty will be 2 per cent. More significantly, for those properties over £500,000, the rate will be 3 per cent.

The notes on clauses are helpful, because they tell us that £390 million will be raised by the increases, more than 75 per cent. of which will be raised on commercial and landed property—mainly commercial property. When people make property transactions, many other areas of the economy are affected. When people move house, there is an effect on the soft furnishings sector. When commercial or office property is sold, there is an effect on lawyers, estate agents and office refurbishment companies. Thus, the whole economy benefits, and the money goes round. One must look at the distorting effect that this tax increase will have.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Does the hon. Gentleman have any idea how many properties worth more than £250,000 are regularly on the market in my constituency?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have no idea, but I suspect that some commercial properties will be on the market. If a profitable firm in the hon. Gentleman's constituency wants to move to a bigger office but cannot do so and is therefore stifled, the hon. Gentleman will not be pleased.

Adam Smith, that great philosopher, said that the cardinal principles of taxation were that it should be simple, fair and easy to administer. The Government clearly did not pay heed to their consultation paper on capital gains tax, as all the measures in the Bill have an effect that is the opposite of Adam Smith's cardinal principle. Capital gains tax is already vastly too complicated; its administration takes up far too much of accountants' and tax professionals' time. Now, it will be even more complicated and expensive to administer, as 17 extra tax bands will be introduced.

Much more spitefully, retirement relief will be removed. After 2003-04, all those people in small and medium businesses who have worked hard all their lives and want to retire with a nest egg will not be able to do so without paying capital gains tax. That is a particularly spiteful measure.

I believe that the Budget has failed. It has failed to encourage an improvement in long-term macro-economics. It does nothing to help inward investment, employment, the balance of payments or growth, and it does nothing to help meet the Chancellor's inflationary target. In short, it is a total failure, and it will come to haunt the Government.

9.20 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Over the past six or so hours, we have had a long, wide-ranging, useful and sometimes entertaining debate, and I want to refer to those hon. Members who have contributed to it.

In a typically thoughtful speech, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) pointed out the continuing uncertainty that is bound up in the arrangements of the new Monetary Policy Committee. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) welcomed bits of the Budget, but then brought to the Floor of the House his quarrel with the Treasury Select Committee—perhaps that would be better left upstairs.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) spoke knowledgeably about capital gains tax, and bravely intervened twice on the Chief Secretary—we shall see in a day or so whether that strengthens or weakens his bid for membership of the Standing Committee.

In one of the best speeches of the day, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) eloquently dealt with the invidious and distortive nature of the new system of corporation tax payments.

The hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) understandably lavished praise on her early-day motion and then asked for some specific capital allowances,

including allowances for fleet owners. We await to see whether the Financial Secretary will exercise largesse on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) rightly drew attention to the growing problem of bootlegging and smuggling, which particularly affects south-east England, especially Kent. It is having a marked effect on the sale of beer and tobacco and on the survival of public houses in our region. That is a matter to which we shall certainly want to return when we debate the detail of the Bill in Committee.

Ms Keeble: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: I am sorry, but I shall not.

The hon. Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) claimed that businesses supported the Budget. Indeed, she claimed that small businesses supported the Budget. She did not mention—I am sure that it was inadvertent—whether large businesses, including car manufacturers in Luton, supported the penal charges that will be put on car use.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) eloquently warned of the dangers to investment—anyone with a serious interest in our economic prospects over the next couple of years would profit from reading his speech again.

In what I am sure was an inadvertently amusing speech, the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) first praised the code for fiscal stability and then urged the Department of Trade and Industry to intervene in the Treasury's handling of the economy. Finally, on the clauses relating to charitable giving, he suggested that third-world countries might welcome out-of-date law books. Perhaps they might welcome even more some out-of-date lawyers to go with them.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) rightly criticised the Government's dogma in hammering manufacturing industry. The hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) praised last year's fiscal tightening, but showed no understanding of the damage that it is doing to his own constituency.

In an enlightening speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) gave us the full benefit of his ministerial, professional and indeed literary expertise. He was equally instructive in the matters of city diesel and gaming duty, and I assure him that those are both matters to which we intend to return in Committee, whether or not he is invited to serve there.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) claimed that the lower rate of corporation tax would create jobs. Presumably, then, he would accept that the increased burden of corporation tax will destroy jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) attacked the arbitrary, retrospective and unparliamentary nature of the Bill and gave us valuable evidence of the changing mood of former Labour supporters by praying in aid his own fence maker: only one, I am sure, of a vast army of specialist craftsmen working on his estate, who are all doubtless equally disillusioned with what they have to pay under new Labour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) drew attention to the Red Book fiasco—a matter to which I shall return later—and pinned down Labour's impact on a typical family budget so effectively that not one Labour Member challenged the figures produced by the Library, showing the burden to have increased by more than £1,000 since 1 May last year.

The hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) said that dialogue was important. I hope that she keeps up that dialogue, and that when unemployment starts rising in her constituency, as I fear it will, she will report back honestly on that.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), in the best tradition of old Liberal politics, spoke up for a single craft product in his constituency. He concentrated his entire speech on the duty not even on cider generally but on bottle-fermented cider: a duty, as I pointed out in an intervention, that has been increased solely to meet the aspirations of European tax harmonisation, which is otherwise endorsed by the Liberal Democrats.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) warned the House eloquently of the prospect of rising unemployment and took the Government to task about the arbitrary powers contained in the Bill.

The Bill is damaging. Yesterday, we had good news: the public sector borrowing requirement is heading back towards balance, at the end of a year that we, the Conservatives, began. That is a tribute to our earlier Budget decisions, which were unpopular at the time, taken in the teeth of a recession and opposed by the Labour party.

Any further progress towards balance simply reflects Labour's commitment to our spending targets. The judgment for the House to make tonight is whether Labour's first two Budgets, encapsulated in the Bill, continue that Conservative progress or jeopardise the golden legacy that Labour inherited. This is a damaging Bill. It confirms all our fears. It confirms Labour's broken promises on tax and complements all the mistakes made in the Government's first Budget. Finally, it confirms that this Government are now pushing business to the very brink of recession.

First, let us deal with the promises. The Government said clearly that there was no need to increase taxes—not income tax, but taxes. The Bill does increase taxes—it increases the people's taxes. It further cuts the married couple's allowance and further adds to the burden of taxation—council tax, petrol tax and personal tax—borne by the ordinary family. That was not in the manifesto of any Labour Member. Those are broken promises.

It is not merely the people who will pay more tax as a result of the Bill, as businesses will pay more. As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford so eloquently set out, the lower rate of corporation tax and the different payment system that the Government propose do not together even compensate for the extra payments involved in bringing corporation tax forward.

Clauses 30 to 36 and the Red Book figures make that clear. Business will pay an extra £1.6 billion in the year beginning 1999, an extra £2 billion in the year beginning 2000 and an extra £3.1 billion in the year beginning 2001, which is about £6.8 billion more in this Parliament alone—far more than the effect of any 1 per cent. cut in

[Mr. Fallon]

the rates. Added to the cost of abolishing ACT credits, that gives a net extra burden on business of £18.5 billion during this Parliament, and that is before the windfall tax, the stamp duty that applies to businesses, the fuel costs that pile extra costs on to businesses and farmers and the extra company car taxation. All those are costs that businesses must now absorb while the Chancellor lectures them on becoming more competitive and the economy slides towards recession. Far from reducing the burden on business, the Bill simply adds to it.

Some of the Bill clumsily—very clumsily—tries to correct some of the mistakes made in the Finance Act 1997. Of course, the rate of corporation tax had to be lowered, simply because business was screaming about the cost of bringing the payments forward. The provisions on the individual savings account attempt to correct the disaster of the consultation document. The code for fiscal stability in itself acknowledges that a Labour Government cannot be trusted not to mess up the public finances.

The Bill goes on to make new, technical, important mistakes on personal pensions and transfer pricing. The industry concerned has written to the Minister, saying:

"There is considerable consternation . . . that insurance companies . . . will be included within the proposed transfer pricing legislation . . . this will result in more expensive financial services products and a poorer deal for the consumer."

The Government have got that wrong. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), the former Paymaster General, pointed out, they did not bother to consult at all on gaming duty. Suddenly, the casinos and the gaming industry were faced without warning with a massive increase. All those are measures that we shall have to put right in Committee.

Of course, we welcome the U-turn on individual savings accounts, but it is only a partial U-turn. The current annual limit of £10,800 is being reduced to £5,000, which is less than half, and it is still a lifetime limit. The Paymaster General, and we have not seen much of him today—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] He is attending to other matters. He said that he will guarantee that the tax relief in the ISA will last for 10 years. It will not have escaped my hon. Friends that a £5,000 limit for 10 years is the £50,000 limit reintroduced by the back door. I further point out to the Financial Secretary that that pledge—and when the Paymaster General talks about trust, we need a little more detail—is not in the Bill. We shall table amendments to ensure that it is.

Above all, the ISA is not likely to be effective. Because the tax credit on dividends has been cut from 20 to 10 per cent., only upper-rate taxpayers will find it worth while. The Labour-dominated Treasury Select Committee stated:

"Given that those on the lowest incomes do not pay income tax anyway, and therefore will not benefit, as well as being short of money to save, it is not immediately obvious how ISAs will help."

On capital gains tax, the Government have still not given answers about the complexity of the proposed taper and their failure to consult adequately. I hope that the Financial Secretary will address the point. Proper consultation is not simply a question of inviting people to write in with their views on capital gains tax. The Treasury Select Committee report states:

"We regret that the capital gains tax proposals were not included in the Pre-Budget Report; we recommend that the Treasury should give urgent attention to reducing the complexity of the new system of tapers."

Clauses 151 and 152 deal with the code for fiscal stability. It is, of course, only a code, and not binding on the Government. The code comprises only the Treasury's understanding of the five principles concerned. Indeed, the Bill provides for the Treasury to be able to modify the code if its understanding of the five key principles should suddenly change. Crucially, the code does not cap tax or spending. Indeed, tax and spending could double and the code could still be satisfied. We see only one advantage in the code for fiscal stability: it puts the Red Book on a statutory basis and ensures that it is accurate.

I come now to the point first raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds. Since the Red Book appeared, the Financial Secretary has had to correct it. She has increased the value of tax credits by £1 billion next year, £3 billion the year after, £5 billion the year after that and £5 billion the year after that, an increase in the full five years of 0.5 per cent. of GDP per year. The difference between the Red Book figures and the table that she had to publish later is £15 billion. In her written answer, she called that a minor error. I shudder to think what she considers a major error. Clearly, she is not a lady one should lightly go shopping with. The Treasury official contacted by the Library acknowledged that the error was highly regrettable. I hope that she will come clean and apologise for her £15 billion mistake.

Finally, I want to address the last point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold. An enormous part of the Bill is left to regulation. At least 22 clauses give the Treasury, the Revenue and Customs and Excise further powers to make regulations that we know will escape proper scrutiny by this House through the negative resolution procedure. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells quoted the tax partner at Coopers and Lybrand who said:

"I think we are getting perilously close to some constitutional issues".

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Fallon: I will not; I have only a minute left.

The *Financial Times* said:

"The Inland Revenue declined to comment, saying the issue was for politicians . . .

Privately, officials . . . believe . . . that Ministers do not want to be seen to make U-turns."

In other words, they want carte blanche tonight to make orders or regulations under 22 different clauses, when outside the House people will not be able to see those requirements and provisions being properly scrutinised.

The key to the long-term stability that both sides of the House want is to encourage savings and investments, not to discourage them; to back business, not to heap extra costs on it; and to keep taxes low. The Bill fails those tests. As with the Chancellor's first effort last July, it will only further undermine savings, further push up the burden of taxation and further push British business into recession. I invite my hon. Friends to vote against it.

9.40 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): This has been a wide-ranging debate. It has ranged from bottle-fermented cider to casinos, from fences in Guildford to the influence that Henry VIII may or may not have had on our proceedings this evening—comments not always obviously connected with the Bill.

The Liberal Democrats want to tax consumers more, but they are against every tax rise. Conservative Members cannot decide among themselves what they agree with. On the one hand they complain that the Bill is too long and complex and on the other they complain that there is too little in it. One minute they advocate the introduction of a taper for taxing long-term capital gains and the next they are rapidly trying to distance themselves from the idea—or at least some Opposition Members are. One minute they claim that the Government have increased the burdens on families, the next they advocate more consumption taxes and criticise the help that we are giving to families through the working families tax credit. The Opposition can presumably agree what today's date is, but not a lot else.

The Budget continues the process of modernising the British economy. The objectives are to raise the sustainable growth rate for the long term, ensuring that everyone has a share in rising prosperity; secure economic stability based on low inflation; sound public finances; promoting enterprise; encouraging work; and creating a fairer and more efficient society. The Bill builds on the work begun in the first Finance Bill of this Parliament, which introduced the new deal, which is already helping the young and long-term unemployed back to work.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I shall make a little progress and give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and other Conservative Members referred to the golden legacy that their Government bequeathed to this Government—the golden legacy of national debt doubling in six years and spending of more than £25 billion a year to service the debt. The Conservative Government doubled VAT when they promised they would not and imposed it on fuel when they said that they would not increase or extend it. One household in five of people of working age with no one in work, rising inequality between rich and poor and one in three children growing up in poverty—that is the golden legacy that the Conservatives claim they left the Labour Government. The electorate took a different view last May—that not only did the Conservatives not have a golden legacy, but they did not have a legacy to stand on at all—and threw them out of office.

The right hon. Member for Wells made an extraordinary speech—I am not sure whether he believed in it himself, let alone expected the House to support him. He said that the length of the Bill was excessive, as was the use of regulation. When he was a Minister, he was a master of the use of regulation and of ensuring that that was how legislation would proceed through the House. The right hon. Gentleman complains, but he turns a blind eye to what he did when he and his party were in government.

The right hon. Gentleman attacks the Government on our policy on diesel, in blissful ignorance of the nitrous oxide and particulate emissions that are so damaging to urban air quality and people's health. In a gratuitous attack, he decides to take a swing at the Government on our review of alcohol and tobacco smuggling and fraud—a problem that his Government failed to tackle. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) also spoke about that problem, although she went a little over the top in blaming the Treasury for everything, including creating crime. I shall return to some of her points later.

The House will recall that in the July Budget we announced a review of alcohol and tobacco fraud. That was co-ordinated by customs in partnership with the trade, for whose representatives' significant contribution I am grateful. The review reported to me at the end of the year, as promised, since when my Treasury colleagues and I have been studying the proposals carefully. As the House might expect, the proposals have resource implications and it is only right and proper that we should decide how they can be evaluated against other commitments and priorities. We shall therefore announce our plans as part of the outcome of the comprehensive spending reviews.

In the meantime, we shall continue to take action to crack down on smuggling. In 1996–97, customs seized smuggled goods to the value of £30 million and I am confident that that figure will be improved on. Smugglers are criminals, not enterprising Jack-the-lads, so I shall be announcing a tougher approach toward offenders and, during the next few weeks, I hope to announce further measures to allow quicker disposal of seized goods and vehicles, which will help to reduce customs' costs.

The hon. Member for Beckenham spoke about the problems of crime, especially the use of tobacco by the young, resulting from smuggled goods. There has been no diversion of resources from drug smuggling to tobacco. The Government are increasing the pressure and concentrating on dealing with smuggling. We do not take a cavalier attitude to the problem. The problem of smuggling did not arise only in the past 10 months, but built up over a number of years because of the Conservative Government's lack of action, so I implore the hon. Lady to support the Government in the action we take.

Mrs. Lait: The hon. Lady may remember using some of the arguments I used tonight when the Conservatives were in government and she was in opposition, so she cannot say that she comes to the debate fresh. Will she tell the House whether the Government have increased the resources available to customs, or is customs having to use the same amount of money to combat both drug smuggling and tobacco and alcohol smuggling?

Dawn Primarolo: That is an incredible argument from a member of the previous Government, who cut customs' resources so substantially as to undermine its ability to tackle that very problem.

The right hon. Member for Wells asked a series of questions about the working families tax credit. In the next Session, in autumn 1998, the main legislation on that will be introduced as a Bill. The detailed rules, setting out who will receive the tax credit and providing information for employers, will be contained in that legislation and will follow Royal Assent to the Bill—and will provide for the important scrutiny of those proposals that the House requires.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) emphasised the importance of stability and of the Government's commitment to manufacturing industry. He spoke about the future of the euro, calling on hon. Members not to engage in ostrich behaviour and pretend that the euro would not happen. He

[Dawn Primarolo]

also, I think by way of congratulation, said that, at the start, the Government were cautious in their policy. I take that as a compliment, because that is no bad thing in the early stages of a new Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) raised many points on environmental policy. I know that she is an active member of the Environmental Audit Committee, before which I have had the pleasure of appearing. The environment measures in the Budget deal with CO_2 emissions, urban air quality and a reduction of vehicle excise duty for buses and lorries with clean fuel. We are restructuring vehicle excise duties on cars and will engage in consultation on that to ensure the use of smaller, cleaner cars.

We have allowed for the conversion of gas vehicles. We have increased the price differential between ultra-low-sulphur diesel and diesel. We are introducing measures on energy-saving materials. We have dealt with free fuel for company car users. We have increased the landfill tax. Policy is developing in many other areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough proposed several candidates for consideration in the context of environmental policy. I carefully noted her arguments—and arguments made by the Environmental Audit Committee and the Treasury Committee. I am sure that Government policy will develop in that area.

Mr. Grieve: How does the hon. Lady view the landfill tax in the light of the problems of illegal dumping that have developed as a direct result of it? Is not the way in which the tax has been introduced a thoroughly blunt instrument?

Dawn Primarolo: That intervention is breathtaking. The landfill tax was introduced by a Conservative Government and the hon. Gentleman is a Conservative Member. We happen to think that it is a good environment tax. Fly tipping needs to be taken seriously and tackled, but that problem is not a reason to weaken the commitment to the landfill tax or to relax our pressure on people to recycle.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) spoke about the comments from the front line of Luton. At a business breakfast, we had the benefit of discussing the Budget proposals with business men and women from her constituency. Like many others, my hon. Friend rightly welcomed the commitments to small business; the reduction in national insurance contributions; the amalgamation of the Contributions Agency into the Inland Revenue; the reduction in corporation tax; and the investment relief changes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) made some good comments on the cash basis proposals in the Bill. He has taken a great interest in anti-avoidance—a matter covered in the Bill—and undoubtedly he will be interested, when the draft clauses are produced for consultation, to see whether we can build on the tax law rewrite proposals to introduce a general anti-avoidance regulation.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon—

Mr. Edward Davey: Kingston and Surbiton.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) mentioned insurance premium tax. I remind him that it too was introduced by the previous Government because of identified value shifting, and that that reasoning still applies, especially in the case of cars and televisions—the examples that he took. The higher rate of IPT on certain travel insurance was applied because of specific market conditions that have developed in this sector. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is far too much background noise. We must hear the Financial Secretary.

Dawn Primarolo: In Committee, we shall be happy to discuss value shifting and IPT, but the Government's position remains the same on the sectors that the hon. Gentleman identified.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Lady is going through a catalogue of taxes. Will she now acknowledge that Government borrowing this year will be less than £1 billion against the previous Government's forecast of £19 billion? Will she explain why, contrary to Government pledges, spending on education as a percentage of GDP should still be falling and say when the nurses and teachers will be able to share in the country's prosperity—in which the hon. Lady says she wants everyone to share?

Dawn Primarolo: I am trying to answer the points that were put to me during the debate, which for numerous hours Conservative Members have implored me to do. We are putting the accounts in proper order and there has been a real increase in spending on education and health. It would be nice if, just occasionally, Liberal Democrats could acknowledge that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) talked about the importance of reducing inequality, to which the Budget makes a key contribution. He talked about the importance of extending the additional personal allowance and removing discrimination.

The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) asked three specific questions. With regard to the hydrocarbon oil duties, I think that I have already said that we are increasing the differential between ultra-low-sulphur diesel and diesel. The right hon. Gentleman is right that we need to build incentives into the system. We are encouraging the distribution of city diesel by increasing the differential and we are encouraged by the number of retail outlets, particularly large supermarkets, that have said that they intend to ensure that that is available.

The right hon. Gentleman asked specific questions about inheritance tax provisions and a series of detailed questions about public access security for owners and, in particular, how we shall ensure that agreements already entered into will be honoured. Given the pressure of time, if the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall write to him on those points and on the points that he made about casinos, particularly London casinos. As a Londoner, there is no way in which I would want to see London persecuted, and it is not the Government's intention to do so either.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) made several important points about making work pay and how the Budget seeks to do that.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) asked whether the new enterprise investment scheme will hit the alternative investment market. It is right to target tax reliefs where they are needed most. The purpose is to encourage the provision of start-up and those who do not already have access to the capital market. The alternative investment market provides an active market share and there is no need for the Exchequer to subsidise it further.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about regulations concerning the taxation of policy holders' gains. They will be included in secondary legislation. The aim is to restrict the charge to a narrow range of products. Using secondary legislation enables us to consult the industry to obtain the definitions and ensure that the legislation is correct.

The hon. Gentleman also asked several questions about the working families tax credit and why it is scored as it is in the Red Book. It follows the national accounts convention for similar schemes such as MIRAS. Where payments are in excess of individuals' total tax liability it will be scored as public expenditure, otherwise it will be seen as tax.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget represents the Government's commitment to fairness in the economy and to a tax system that delivers to those who want to work. It will ensure that small businesses can thrive and that, by agreement and consultation, the Government base their policies on what is good for the country instead of on what is good for the political party in power, as the Conservative Government did. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 144, Noes 350.

Division No. 249] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie

Caplin, Ivor
Cassle, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colley, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davis, Cynog
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sailer, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil

Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Janet Anderson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 190.

Division No. 250] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*

Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Janet Anderson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nigel Waterson and Mr. Oliver Heald.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills),

That—

(1) Clauses 1, 7, 10, 11, 25, 27, 30, 75, 119 and 147 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

(2) the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

(3) when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—[*Dawn Primarolo.*]

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have the Government requested to make an urgent statement regarding reports in today's edition of the *New York Times*? As you may be aware, a sweetheart deal has been proposed between the Prime Minister and President Clinton on the processing of nuclear waste at Dounreay. According to the *New York Times*, the Prime Minister has agreed that shipments of waste, which the United States and France refused to process, will come from Georgia to the United Kingdom, despite the fact that the matter has not come before the House. I wonder whether, given the Government's

reputation for open government, we can expect a statement, or is this an example of Government humbug and hypocrisy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have just told the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) that it was not a matter for me. Does the right hon. Gentleman have a point of order?

Mr. Gummer: I think it is a point of order to ask whether the Prime Minister has applied to make a statement on whether he has asked the Law Officers if he has the legal right to allow into this country waste that it appears cannot be produced here. If he has not, he is acting in a presidential way and not a parliamentary and legal way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman was a Minister, and he must know that the Chair does not discuss what approaches have been made to him.

European Community (Convergence Criteria)

10.28 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I beg to move,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1998–99 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

The purpose of this debate is to satisfy section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, popularly known as Maastricht Act. The Act requires that Parliament approve the Government report which is the basis of information that is sent to the Commission or the Council for the purposes of articles 103 and 104c of the Maastricht treaty. The articles relate to the broad economic guidelines and excessive deficit procedure respectively. The debate takes place thanks to the diligence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith)—now the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights—when in opposition.

Section 5 of the Maastricht Act specifies that the Government should report to Parliament for approval an assessment of the medium-term economic and budgetary position in relation to public investment expenditure and the social, economic and environmental goals set in article 2 of the treaty. Those goals include sustainable and non-inflationary growth, respecting the environment, a high level of employment and social protection, raising the standard of living and the quality of life and economic and social cohesion.

The "Financial Statement and Budget Report" published in March is an appropriate vehicle for that. It clearly sets out how the Government intend to set their social, economic and environmental objectives and the position on public investment. For the first time, it also includes an environmental assessment of the Budget measures as well as providing a broad overview of how the Budget package is designed to address the economic problems facing the country.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Minister admit that the Government's conduct of economic policy and the constraints on public expenditure which are causing such pain to her constituents and others, and to the trade union movement, are due to the Government's pursuing the Maastricht criteria?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I will not. However, I shall admit to a deep sense of gratitude to the hon. Gentleman for the great assistance he gave my party in the general election. My hon. Friends and I are well aware of the great benefits derived from his inestimable service to the Labour party this time last year.

To return to the subject of tonight's debate, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget a package of measures to secure economic stability, reward work, encourage enterprise and create a fairer society. The Government's macro-economic policies will secure economic stability; the extension of the new deal programmes and radical tax and benefit reforms will promote employment and make work pay; and the overall

[Mrs. Liddell]

commitment to fairness will support families with children, tackle child poverty, improve the environment and ensure that the tax system is fair.

The Budget saw a further extension of policies to put economic management on a more stable, longer-term footing. The Government have tightened fiscal policy considerably and have put the public finances on a long-term sustainable basis. Fiscal policy was tightened significantly in 1997-98 and the March Budget locked in that fiscal tightening for future years. The Government are well on track to meet their fiscal rules. The general Government financial deficit was estimated to have been only 0.75 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1997–98 and it is forecast to turn to surplus by 1999–2000. That demonstrates that the Government are taking a prudent approach to fiscal policy to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

The fiscal framework is being developed further to apply a similar approach to that for monetary policy. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced that the Government are to legislate for a code for fiscal stability which will set out the requirements for an open, transparent and accountable approach to managing the public finances. Coupled with the changes already announced to monetary policy, that will ensure that macro-economic policy will be set in the context of a stable long-term outlook.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): May I remind the Minister that we are debating whether or not we should take note of the Government's fiscal and Budget forecasts with regard to submitting them to the European Monetary Institute as part of our convergence plan? Will she address the issue of monetary union instead of using the debate to justify another advertising campaign on behalf of the Government's economic policy, which owes much to the success of that of the previous Administration?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman should turn his attention to fiction. I will refer to monetary union in due course because I cannot resist the opportunity of seeing what version of Opposition policy we will get this evening. If the hon. Gentleman—who has long-standing Scottish connections—will adhere to the injunction, "Haud your wheesht," I will get round to it.

The Budget moved forward the Government's aim of encouraging work. Unemployment remains high, yet there are hundreds of thousands of unfilled vacancies. Moreover, around one in five working-age households have no one in work, and the number of people who want a job stands at the highest level in the EU. It is clear that structural problems are hindering an efficient functioning of the labour market and, at the same time, blighting the future for hundreds and thousands of families.

Mr. Jenkin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The motion refers to taking note of the Budget report

"for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993."

Surely that restricts the discussion to the relevance of the report to monetary union and the convergence criteria and does not legitimise a general discussion about welfare to work or the number of people available for work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman's interpretation is incorrect. This is a wide debate on the Government's economic policies.

Mrs. Liddell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is hurting so much at the Government's success. If he wishes to withdraw for a while and come back, he will be able to listen as his hon. Friends demonstrate the extent to which unity in the Conservative party contributed to the Labour victory at the last election.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): The Minister referred to the lower rates of unemployment in the UK as compared with continental Europe. To what does she attribute the lower rates of unemployment in the UK?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman was not listening. I referred to the fact—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The Minister is playing for time.

Mrs. Liddell: We have an hour and a half to discuss this matter, and I have now taken a number of interventions. The hon. Gentleman is clearly anxious that I should proceed so that his hon. Friends can become involved in the debate, so I am quite happy to take no further interventions.

One of the Government's key policies is to reduce unemployment. Another is to make sure that we have an adequate statistical base for measuring unemployment, after the fiddles perpetrated by the previous Government.

The welfare-to-work package is of great significance to my constituents and to those of my hon. Friends. For too many years we have seen families locked into a cycle of poverty as a result of unemployment—and for the past 18years that situation has deteriorated. It is essential that we move forward, and that we move people from welfare into work. The March Budget extended the scope of the package to encompass additional groups excluded not just from the labour market but from a prosperous society. Those people were excluded by the previous Government consciously and deliberately—they called it "a price worth paying".

Coupled with the extensions to the welfare-to-work programme, the Budget also introduced the start of radical reform of the tax and benefits system. It was clear that the previous system was not offering the right incentives; it discouraged many from working by high marginal deduction rates. The Budget introduced a package of measures that will result in the number of people facing marginal deduction rates falling more than 70 per cent., from 750,000 to only 250,000.

The protection of the environment is at the heart of the Government's objectives for the tax system. The core principles of sustainable development lie at the heart of many of the Budget measures, as we heard earlier this evening. An environmental assessment of the Budget was published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" for the first time.

The Budget continued the policy of increasing road fuel duties by 6 per cent. in real terms, as well as introducing a range of other measures to ensure the protection of the environment. Moreover, the Government reaffirmed their commitment to exploring the scope for using the tax system and other mechanisms such as regulation, with consultations on the industrial use of energy and the extraction of aggregates.

The Budget also addressed the problem of underinvestment, which has at least partially accounted for the United Kingdom's relatively low gross domestic product per head. The measures to promote economic stability should increase investment, and the Budget also introduced major changes to the corporate and capital taxation systems aimed at further promoting investment.

The Government are committed to worthwhile public sector capital investment—the private finance initiative has a key role to play in that. When we were elected, we instituted and carried out a thorough review of the initiative; introduced legislation where necessary; set up a task force; and pushed through a small number of significant projects. Progress under the PFI has been rapid, and projects with a combined capital value of more than £1.5 billion have been signed since the general election. From 1998-99 to 2000-2001, some £11½ billion in new investment is expected as a result of the revived PFI.

It is important that we send details of the economic policies set out in our Budget to the Commission and the Council. That will enable us to meet our obligations under the treaty to provide information to facilitate the process of economic surveillance and co-ordination provided for in articles 103 and 104 of the treaty. There is nothing new in that—full arrangements for economic surveillance at Community level have been in place for more than 20 years.

The Government support the principle of independent examination of our economic performance by a number of international bodies, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the Group of Seven. The information will be used to facilitate the process of discussion and co-ordination of economic policy between member states of the European Union. That process enables best practice to be shared and issues of common interest to be discussed.

The Government believe that the process of economic surveillance and co-ordination is valuable. Sharing information and discussing issues of common interest promotes the adoption of sound policies and forms the basis for a positive and constructive approach. That will help us to strengthen the European economies, and it will be particularly important at the beginning of the single currency. We shall secure Britain's influence in resolving the economic problems that Europe faces if we play our full part in these discussions. That will help us to lead in a way that is right for Britain and, we believe, right for Europe.

The Government's new positive approach to Europe is already beginning to pay dividends. We have been able to focus Europe's attention on the job creation agenda. Last year, the Chancellor launched the "Getting Europe to Work" initiative, and member states are now preparing action plans to reduce unemployment by targeting employability, flexibility and entrepreneurship. That will be a feature of the European Council meeting in Cardiff in June.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: I shall not give way at the moment, as there have already been complaints that I am taking too much time, and I have a number of substantive points to make. However, I am glad that some hon. Members seem to have had a pleasant evening.

Our achievements during our presidency of the European Union show what can be done by working closely with the other member states, as was highlighted by the Prime Minister's half-term report on the United Kingdom presidency. The Chancellor's initiative on economic reform was endorsed by EU Finance Ministers at the informal ECOFIN in York last month, and member states committed themselves to specific action to improve Europe's employment policies and markets, signing up to the principles of open markets and free competition.

As I noted earlier, sharing information and discussion of economic policies will be particularly important at the beginning of the single currency. I know that Conservative Members are anxious to discuss the single currency, and we are interested to hear their views on the matter, regardless of how many there may be.

The Government assessed UK membership of the single currency against five key economic tests and concluded that there is not at present sufficient convergence to be sure that the British economy would have stability and prosperity in economic and monetary union, so we have decided not to participate in the single currency at its launch in 1999 and have notified our European partners accordingly.

Nevertheless, we want the single currency to be a success. It will affect us whether we participate or not. Our economic future is bound up with that of our European partners. The majority of our trade is with the European Union, so it is in our interest to ensure that the potential benefits can be realised.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Liddell: I see that the very mention of Europe has provoked the predictable Pavlovian response among Conservative Members.

Dr. Fox: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Economic Secretary might inadvertently mislead the House. The Foreign Secretary said in the previous debate on the subject that the majority of the United Kingdom's trade was outwith the European Union.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mrs. Liddell: I see that Conservative Members have changed their minds and now want me to speak for as long as is humanly possible, preventing Back-Bench Members from taking part in this time-limited debate.

It is important that economies have the ability to react more flexibly to changes in economic circumstances. That is one of the reasons why we have been pushing so hard

[Mrs. Liddell]

for economic reform. Sharing information will help to ensure that the single currency succeeds, and that will bring benefits to the UK and other countries.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the beginning of her speech, the Economic Secretary denied that the Government's economic policies had anything to do with the Maastricht criteria, but she has just said exactly the opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What right hon. and hon. Members say in the House is not a matter for the Chair, provided that it is at least within the rules of order. I might also say to those on the Opposition Benches that we shall make more progress if they listen to the debate.

Mrs. Liddell: Your point is an interesting one, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Indeed, if the hon. Gentleman had listened, he would have heard me say quite clearly that our economic policy is not determined by compliance with the Maastricht criteria. The very fact that we meet many of the Maastricht criteria is something that the House is entitled to discuss.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) *rose—*

Mrs. Liddell: I will not take any more interventions. I want to make progress, because I am anxious to hear what Conservative Members have to say on these matters. It is always illuminating to find out what the policy on Europe is today and which section of the Conservative party is in the ascendancy.

This motion, if approved, will enable the United Kingdom to meet our treaty obligations. We will provide information and participate fully in the important process of multilateral surveillance and economic co-operation, as provided for in articles 103 and 104c of the treaty. I hope that the House will support the motion.

10.49 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South–West Devon): I thank the Economic Secretary for leaving me a few moments to make some remarks. First, I must commiserate with her for having been sent to the House this evening in place of the Paymaster General, who took this debate last year. I suppose that it is an increasing embarrassment to the Government to have a Minister they cannot bring to the House.

Mrs. Liddell: If the hon. Gentleman had done his research, he would have found that I am the Minister at the Treasury with responsibility for European affairs, and I was grateful to the Paymaster General for taking the debate last year because I was engaged in the Standing Committee of the Finance Bill. That was not a particularly good start, as the hon. Gentleman got his facts wrong in his first sentence.

Mr. Streeter: It is amazing the number of excuses that the Government will come up with to hide the Paymaster General from the scrutiny of the House.

The report that the Government will send to the European Commission as a result of the motion is a classic piece of new Labour political wizardry. It is the triumph of packaging over substance. It has a snappy title, "New Ambitions for Britain"—perhaps, the only surprise is that it is not, "New Ambitions for Cool Britannia"—it has a heart-warming photo on the front cover of happy children, revelling, no doubt, in the prospect of their first visit to the millennium dome in 2000, and it contains many fine words and warm sentiments. The Economic Secretary mentioned some of them. The report talks of encouraging work, promoting enterprise and creating a fairer society. At first glance, no doubt, those charming gentlemen and ladies in Brussels who will be reading it would be forgiven for believing that all in Britain's economic garden is rosy. Like new Labour itself, however, the reality is very different.

The report masks a dangerous underlying reality, and it is this: as a direct consequence of decisions that the Government have taken since 1 May 1997, the golden economic legacy left to them by the outgoing Conservative Government is being squandered step by step—frittered away. The economic ship of state that was sailing so magnificently under the previous Conservative Government has now turned into turbulent waters, perhaps even heading for the rocks. That legacy of low inflation, steady growth, rising living standards, falling unemployment and strong exports is seriously under threat because of economic mismanagement by the Government.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): If all was so absolutely rosy in the garden, why on earth did the Conservative party suffer its most humiliating defeat this century?

Mr. Streeter: Many people are now asking themselves exactly the same question. Everyone is entitled to make a mistake with their vote once in their lives.

The excessive strength of the pound is at the heart of that economic mismanagement, as we all know. It is causing British manufacturers and exporters severe competitive difficulties. Their products are being priced out of overseas markets because of the excessive strength of the pound. As we all know, in international trade these days, deals are won or lost at the margins. The strength of the pound and that extra burden on the prices of our products can make or break a deal. The performance of sterling is crippling our exporters. From our constituencies, we all know that throughout the country, large, small and medium-sized firms are feeling the pinch. That will affect jobs and people are beginning to suffer.

Recent newspaper headlines—too late, of course, to be included in that glossy report—tell the sorry tale. The *Daily Mail* on 17 April, under the headline,

"Recession warning as exports crumble",

says:

"The BCC survey is stark confirmation of the fears expressed by manufacturers over the last few months. They say that the series of rises in the cost of borrowing since Labour won power last May has added to sterling's strength to such an extent that their earnings from overseas have been devastated.

The steel industry has been particularly affected. Some firms have reported 40 per cent. reductions in export earnings over the last 18 months. There are now fears of plant closures and job losses."

Thank you, new Labour.

On Friday, under the heading,

"Pound surges as exports plummet",

The Independent reports:

"Confirming other evidence of the weak state of manufacturing in the first few months of this year, the survey reported a fall in home and export orders and sales, slower employment growth and lower investment intentions. The export figures for manufacturing had only been worse once in the history of the survey.

Small and medium sized businesses were being hit hardest, the Chambers of Commerce said. Deteriorating cash-flow was a particular problem for the smallest."

Small businesses are being hit by this Government.

The strength of the pound is not hitting only the manufacturing sector. *The Guardian* is, perhaps, a paper more to Labour's liking, although with new Labour, that may not be so true any longer. Last week, under the heading,

"Sterling woe spreading to services",

it reported:

"Industry leaders yesterday begged the Bank of England to call a halt to interest rate rises as new evidence showed that the pain caused by the strong pound has spread from manufacturing into the services sector.

Export sales and orders for UK firms have slumped to a seven-year low, according to the latest quarterly economic survey from the British Chambers of Commerce.

Manufacturers are suffering export losses, while the services sector, which has until now shown little signs of slowing down, recorded its lowest positive ratio for six years of firms expecting export growth."

Beneath the glitz, gloss and spin of the Red Book is the harsh reality that British manufacturing companies, exporters and even service sector companies are being battered by Labour's economic mismanagement, while domestic demand continues to increase. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor said recently:

"The Chancellor claimed he would end the cycle of boom and bust. But he is the first Chancellor to give us both at once. Manufacturing in recession, while domestic demand risks overheating."

Although the Government will not take responsibility for anything, they cannot avoid the stark truth that the strength of the pound arises largely from their decisions.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): While the hon. Gentleman is castigating Administrations, can he give us his view of the fact that the pound sterling rose against the deutschmark by 20 per cent. between May 1996 and May 1997? It has risen a worrying further 10 per cent. since. Between May 1990 and May 1997, the pound sterling changed in value against the deutschmark no fewer than 87 times. Is he proud of that stewardship?

Mr. Streeter: The Opposition are not against a strong pound. We are against the excessively strong pound over which the Government have reigned for the past 11 months. Nowhere in the report is there a confession that Labour policies have put us in that difficulty.

The Prime Minister apologised for Labour sleaze before Christmas. The Secretary of State for Health apologised this week to nurses because he could not afford their pay increase. Why cannot the Chancellor or the Economic Secretary apologise to British exporters, companies and people for the fact that Labour policies have placed them in this mess? There were at least three huge blunders.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend agree that the threat of a soft euro is serving further to increase pressure in the direction of excessively strong sterling, and that it is precisely the Prime Minister being so feeble in failing to tell the rest of the European Community that a soft euro is unacceptable that strengthens the pressure on sterling, to the great detriment of British manufacturing and service industry?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right and he anticipates the third of the three blunders that I am coming on to describe. He is right to make that point.

The first blunder was to hand over interest rate management to an independent Bank of England. Of course a group of professional bankers and economists, when asked to focus exclusively on hitting a specific inflation target, will always err on the side of caution. Of course interest rates will be kept artificially high to make sure that the target is reached. We warned the Government that that would happen, and happen it has, but as usual, they would not listen.

Even Neil Kinnock said in this House that anyone could reach an inflation target if they were prepared to level the economy to do so. Perhaps these days, Neil Kinnock is not quoted by new Labour Members. Someone who actually believed in something would not be in fashion with new Labour. He absolutely got it right. One can hit inflation targets if one is prepared to level the economy to do so. We warned that giving independence to the Bank of England on interest rate policy was a mistake, and now the country is paying the price of that mistake. The Chancellor continues with his "not me, Guv" approach. It is time that he took responsibility for monetary policy, as he was elected to do.

The second blunder is that the Chancellor has helped to create conditions for a consumer boom by encouraging people to spend rather than to save. In his previous Budget, he introduced a swingeing tax on people's personal pensions. Is he surprised that they then go out not to save but to spend? He should be making saving for retirement a priority. Instead, he penalises it.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): If the hon. Gentleman were the Chancellor of the Exchequer just now, with full power over monetary policy, what would he do with what he alleges is the over-strong pound?

Mr. Streeter: If the hon. Gentleman would just listen to my speech, I am giving him the answers to that very question. If he will listen and take some heed, perhaps some good will come out of this debate tonight.

The Red Book demonstrates that over the lifetime of this Parliament, the percentage of the nation's income being saved will fall from 11 to 9.5 per cent. What a terrible indictment it is—

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town): Answer the question.

Mr. Streeter: To encourage people to save is part of the answer. Botched plans to tamper with personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts demonstrate the Government's willingness to penalise thrift, and people have got the message—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. I say to Labour Members what I said

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

to Opposition Members earlier. The debate will be conducted better if we do not have sedentary interventions.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Consumer spending will continue to rise, bringing higher interest rates than would otherwise be the case.

The third blunder, and probably the most important, is the one to which my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) alluded earlier. The Government are committing the cardinal sin of allowing a soft euro to be created. In the past few months, we have seen a flight out of continental currencies into sterling because investors fear that they will have a fudged and soft single currency. The British Government, during their presidency of the European Union, had the opportunity to ensure that each member state seeking to participate in the currency on 1 January 1999 had strictly complied with the convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht treaty.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): My hon. Friend heard the Economic Secretary to the Treasury say just a little while ago that the key was to share information. Does he agree that one of the pieces of information and advice that the Government could do well to give, especially to Belgium and Italy, is on how to deal with short-term borrowings, which will almost certainly undermine the convergency criteria that the Government seem happy to rubber-stamp?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valuable point. It is a staggering fact that the Prime Minister has not had the strength and courage to stand up to the pressure from those countries to prevent them from weakening the euro in the way that is now clearly going to happen. Even a cursory glance at the figures shows that nothing could be further from the truth than the idea of strict convergence criteria being met by many of those applicant countries. Almost all of them failed the strict criteria on Government debt to GDP ratio, but we learn that the words of the treaty are to be interpreted flexibly, and our Government have agreed to that. There will almost certainly be 11 countries signing up for the euro on day 1, some of which will have qualified by taking part in the kind of gymnastics of which Olga Korbut would have been proud.

No wonder a French Minister last week compared the prospects of a soft euro to the launching of the Titanic. French Ministers are aware of the relevance of the Titanic, but it seems that our Government are more keen to do the full Monty. No wonder investors have no confidence in the strength and integrity of the soft euro, and no wonder sterling continues to rise as a result. Is it not ironic that new Labour is prepared to stand up to hard-working and deserving British nurses and to fund their pay rise over a period of time and not in full, but is not prepared to stand up to politicians on the continent who want to ram through a fudged single currency, irrespective of the dangers to all of us, by using powers more appropriate to the captain of the Titanic?

It is the British people who are paying the price of Labour incompetence. Jobs will be lost in the manufacturing sector, so I ask the Economic Secretary what the point is of spending billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on subsidised jobs for the long-term young unemployed through the front door, while pursuing economic policies that scupper thousands of British jobs through the back door. What is the point of that? The report does not give the full picture, but one thing is certain: unless the Government learn their lessons quickly, next year's report is likely to make extremely grim reading.

That brings me to my second point. On page 129, the report refers to the net contribution to the European Union made by the United Kingdom. As the calculation of our contribution is in ecu and as the pound is strong, as we have already mentioned, that net contribution has come down in terms of sterling. Naturally, we welcome that. The Conservatives are and always have been prepared to see this country pay a fair price for our membership of the European Union, but it must be a fair price and part of the guarantee of that fair price is the UK rebate that Baroness Thatcher won at Fontainebleau in 1984.

Throughout many of the countries in the EU—Germany, France and Holland in particular—a head of steam is building up about the British rebate, and it is likely to come under threat in the next six to 12 months, once the lacklustre British presidency finally fizzles out at the end of June. The Economic Secretary will understand the public interest in that matter and the great public concern that will be felt if our rebate is diminished in any way. Therefore, I give her the opportunity tonight to make it clear to the House and to our European partners that there are no circumstances in which the present Government, for at least the lifetime of this Parliament, will permit any reduction in the UK rebate, no matter what pressure is put on them; and that they will use their veto, if necessary, to protect our rebate. I shall give way to allow the hon. Lady to respond.

Mrs. Liddell: I am delighted to answer the hon. Gentleman's point. In no circumstances would we be prepared to see any movement in our abatement. We are determined to stick by the abatement. I have made that perfectly clear in debates in Committee and I am happy to do so on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Streeter: The House will be delighted to hear that confirmation from the Economic Secretary, which is the one I hoped she would give. The Opposition will hold her and the Prime Minister to account for the commitment and undertaking that they have given this evening.

By the time the ink was dry on this glossy report, it was out of date—overtaken by the consequences of Labour's economic misjudgments since 1 May. By all means, let it be sent to Brussels, but it does not tell the true story of the real challenges facing the British economy and the bleak future of thousands of British workers, thanks to Labour's economic mismanagement.

11.8 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I have not participated in the debate on Europe since the election, because my view on the matter is known: I voted against the Maastricht treaty, and I am opposed to the single currency.

The reason I speak in this debate is that it is held against the background of a clear Government statement of intent to join the single currency, when the conditions

are appropriate. The convergence report is a progress report—the Government ask us, not only to note, but to approve the progress they are making toward entry into the single currency when the referendum has occurred. We are told that that will be after the next election, but, if Rupert Murdoch alters his view, it might come earlier.

Two passages in the report are of importance, not just in a debate of this kind in the House, but to many people outside. On page 6, the report refers to

"Denmark, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Finland and the United Kingdom."

It says:

"These Member States need to exercise firm control over domestic price pressures with regard to, inter alia, wage and unit labour costs. Support is also required from fiscal policies, which need to react flexibly to the domestic price environment."

If I were a nurse whose pay claim had been phased, I would ask why. If a nurse asked me that question, I would reply, "The answer is in this book, because it is a requirement that these controls be exercised in order to equip us for the single currency." I come from Derbyshire, where we are rate-capped, and if, in Derbyshire, people ask me, "Why is Derbyshire, which suffered so much under the previous Government, being rate-capped?" I would answer, "Because of page 6 of the convergence report."

We must relate these arguments to real life. We cannot speak as though we were amateur economists; we must relate them to the real lives of those we represent. The reality is that the framework, set by the European Monetary Institute and adopted by the Government, is forcing a squeeze on people, who will suffer as a result.

My second point—I do not want to take too long—relates to the independence of national central banks. On page 12, the report says clearly that a list of practices by Governments or Parliaments are

"incompatible with the Treaty and/or the Statute"

if they endanger institutional independence—that is, from Governments or Parliaments. So here, tonight, we are being asked to accept that we have no right in the following areas. We have no right to give instructions to central banks or their decision-making bodies, not just on interest rates but on anything that they do. Eddie George is free—protected by the treaty from any pressures that may be put on him by the Government elected overwhelmingly by the people in May 1997.

Indeed, it would be incompatible with the treaty to

"approve, suspend, annul or defer decisions of national central banks;"

or to

"censor a national central bank's decisions on legal grounds".

Whatever the legislation might be, the courts would not be allowed to take action that would hamper the independence of the central banks. Indeed, we cannot

"participate in the decision-making bodies of a national central bank with a right to vote".

Therefore, if the Chancellor appoints people to the Monetary Policy Committee and they vote on a matter, they are in breach of the Maastricht treaty. Finally, third parties could not be

"consulted (ex ante)"—

in advance—

"on any national central bank decision."

Tonight, not only are we approving a policy—which is causing hardship to many people because of the restriction on public expenditure, and because, as has been said, the currency valuation affects jobs—but we are being asked to approve an abandonment of our right ever to do anything in those areas that might relieve those pressures.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I believe that my right hon. Friend is right to say that we would not have the rights, as a Parliament, to instruct the European central bank on issues such as unemployment, but surely it goes further. Not only would we not have the right, but it would be positively illegal if we tried to influence the European central bank on issues such as unemployment, low pay and poverty.

If that is the case—if Parliament no longer controls economic policy making—surely, at elections, the people will then find that the people they can vote for are not the people who take the decisions. The people they want to have an opportunity to vote for—the bankers—will be taking the decisions. Surely that makes a mockery of parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Benn: I object to these arrangements, not as a British person but as a European, because they destroy democracy in Germany and France, too. For example, the German people will be unable to influence the decision of their bankers. My hon. Friend referred to the limitation on our opportunity, as a nation, to try to influence the European central bank, but it applies also to attempts to influence our own Bank.

To summarise, we are tonight consenting to an act of unilateral economic, industrial and financial disarmament. From now on we are saying to our electors—who are, after all, the people who have sent us here and can remove us, because we are still candidates—"You can remove us next time, but you will never be able to change the policies that may lead you to want to remove us."

That is a big question. It is something that we do not often discuss, and if we do, sometimes in the heat of the day and in argument we get strong and personal, because it is a matter which cuts across political allegiances. It is a European, and a democratic, question.

We are all, inevitably, influenced by our own experience. The earliest election that I remember was that in 1931, when the conflicts within the Labour Cabinet on whether the gold standard should apply led to the fall of that Government. My father lost his seat in that election. He had the unhappy experience of fighting Aberdeen, whose electors were cautious when the Post Office scare appeared, Aberdonians being known for their caution.

In the 1930s, I remember vividly Hitler coming to power when there were 5 million or 6 million unemployed in Germany. I bought "Mein Kampf" when I was 11. I have it on my shelf at home. Unemployment leads to despair, and despair destroys democracy, just as political impotence destroys democracy. If, when we vote, we cannot change anything, that destroys democracy. There are now 15 million unemployed in the European Union. I am not saying that what happened in the 1930s will return, but we are dealing with big questions.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: No. I promised that I would be brief, and I will.

[Mr. Benn]

We are dealing with the question whether it is legitimate in countries that boast of democracy for the electors to elect a Government and a Parliament that can influence the form of their own lives. It applies throughout the EU. This is not a British objection—I would feel just as strongly if I were a Frenchman, a Spaniard, a Greek or from any other country.

We shall have more of this when we come to the debates on the single currency, but it is important to put down a marker now, before we go along quietly approving things which are already taking place, beginning with the independence of the Bank of England, and denying those who sent us here the rights that they are entitled to expect when they cast their vote. For those reasons, I shall not be able to support the motion tonight. It runs counter to my deepest convictions, and that is a view that I hope people will understand, even if they do not agree with it.

11.16 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Tonight, the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" is about the United Kingdom handing its homework in to Europe, hoping that the European Commission will give us a gold star for our performance during the past year. Yet we have a Budget with two different agendas. First, there is the running of the domestic economy and the Prime Minister's insatiable appetite for re-election at all costs, and, secondly, there is the Chancellor of the Exchequer's agenda, which is preparation for monetary union. At some point, those will come into conflict, and I look forward to the political consequences.

The Prime Minister claims credit for anything that is good, taking more power to himself, and the Chancellor the Exchequer gives any responsibility away. While the Prime Minister plays God himself, the Chancellor plays Pontius Pilate, and an interesting play it will be at some point, but it will certainly be devoid of passion.

The first question that we need to mention following the Economic Secretary's opening speech this evening concerns the Government's initial economic act in the Parliament, which was independence for the Bank of England. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will accept the importance of transparency in making monetary policy decisions. The Monetary Policy Committee should make its reasoning clear and publish its minutes, but the Chancellor should make the ultimate decision, because it is the Chancellor who is responsible, not only for monetary policy ultimately, but for fiscal policy, and the long-term and wide-ranging effects on the economy.

To allow the one instrument that the Chancellor had to pass into the hands of the Bank of England so that he now has no control is surely a reckless political act, given the consequences that we are now seeing of what an over-conservative Bank of England might do.

However, in all frankness, it is not all doom and gloom. The very basis on which the Conservative party came to power in 1979, and the entire ethos of Baroness Thatcher's Government, was that if we had another Labour Government, at least we would never have another socialist Government. The Government may be erring on the side of conservative caution. Conservative Members can gain a little comfort from that, although some Labour Members are having to live through their worst nightmare.

Some of the phrases used by the Economic Secretary give us cause for concern, even if we are not frank enough to laugh at them. She spoke of economic stability and referred to promoting employment. They are meaningless soundbites and are utterly incomprehensible, given the Budget. The Government must understand that they cannot govern by soundbites, because their actions have an impact on the real economy, real people, real inflation, real unemployment and real manufacturing. They do not understand such concepts after such a long time in opposition.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter) said, the Government inherited a golden economic legacy: low inflation, falling public debt and falling unemployment. When I asked the Economic Secretary why we have low unemployment whereas unemployment rates in Europe are much higher, no answer was I given. She cannot bear to hear the answer to that question. There is low unemployment in this country because we made the necessary supply-side reforms during 18 years of Conservative government. That was not easy: they were achieved not by photo opportunities and soundbites, but by tough policies that hurt, which were not politically easy for us to implement and which had a cost. Those reforms made us unpopular, but we made them because we believed that they were right. They have given us a tremendous economic advantage in our trade worldwide.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why the economy that the Government inherited was so good was that we came out of the exchange rate mechanism? The Leader of the Opposition has rightly apologised for the mistake that we made in entering the ERM and for the manner in which we conducted our membership of it. We would never enter it again, whereas the Government most emphatically would.

Dr. Fox: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There has been an indecent obsession with currency as more than just another commodity, which is what it is. Currency reflects a wide range of economic circumstances. If we make a single commodity the be-all and end-all of our economic policy, we shall have the same problems that we had when we tried to have fixed exchange rates in the ERM. The Government refuse to rule out rejoining the exchange rate mechanism in the coming years.

It is true that many other economies have managed to live with a strong currency over a period of time. However, the problem that we have is that our currency does not reflect our economic strength. Our currency is over-inflated because of the Government's mismanagement. They gave away the main instrument for controlling inflation: interest rate policy.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I support my hon. Friend's remarks. The Bank of England is having to raise interest rates to control inflation because the Government have transferred vast sums from people's savings into spending. We should never lose sight of the fact that Government spending causes inflation.

Dr. Fox: Perhaps I am more transparent than I give myself credit for, but my hon. Friend anticipates my next point. When the Government came to power in 1997, there was growing domestic demand, not least as a result

of windfall gains. They should have taken money out of the short-term economy, but they did the exact opposite and taxed savings. They made it less likely that people will take money out of the economy in the short term by putting money aside for themselves in the longer term. It is a catastrophe, a strategic economic mistake for which the Government and, more important, the people of this country will pay a high price in the years to come.

That will be coupled with the other economic mistake that the Government are making, by introducing a minimum wage. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) laughs—perhaps he has also had a good evening. The number of people who, by receiving the minimum wage, will have a direct inflationary impact on the economy will be small, but in large areas of the public sector, such as the national health service, it will not be those who receive the minimum wage who will have an inflationary effect, but those who want to retain the differentials. People who are on a wage just above the minimum will say, "Those below me have just had an 8 per cent. wage rise, so I expect to get the same." The Government will create that inflationary pressure. That is the inflationary pressure about which my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Devon spoke, and the Government will have to deal with it, although they seem incapable of doing that.

The bigger picture is our relationship with Europe, and an indecent obsession with a one-way route towards a united states of Europe is at the heart of the debate. People are becoming increasingly obsessed with every aspect of the European economy, including monetary, trading and political aspects. We must be realistic about Europe. Since 1990, only two European countries have maintained their share of world trade. Italy has held its share steady and the United Kingdom has marginally increased its share. Every other European Union nation has had a diminution in its share of world trade. The Government are asking us to link ourselves more closely to the European economy when the importance of that economy in world terms is shrinking.

Mrs. Liddell: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will answer one simple question. Who signed the Maastricht treaty?

Dr. Fox: It is depressing and appalling that the Government refuse to take any responsibility for what they are doing. We are putting detailed arguments about the future of our economy, about those who are employed in it, about the wealth and pensions of our people, and about our trading position and relationship to Europe. The best that the Economic Secretary can do is to say, "Who signed the Maastricht treaty?" She knows as well as we do that the previous Government signed it and that they were fully supported by the Labour party, which included her.

Mrs. Liddell: I was not here.

Dr. Fox: That is a sad sign of the economic and intellectual level of Treasury Ministers.

Mr. Jenkin: I heard the Economic Secretary make the sedentary remark that while her party supported the Maastricht treaty, she did not. She is obviously disclaiming all personal responsibility for the Maastricht treaty.

Dr. Fox: I shall not be tempted down that route. My hon. Friend knows that it is entirely possible for Labour to believe two opposites not just before lunch but simultaneously at any time of the day. Only in a party that has had more thoughts go through its waistband than through its head since the general election would that be possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

Not only is Europe's share of world trade declining but, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has said, Europe has high unemployment. We are not debating a small difference in unemployment between this side of the channel and the other: large numbers of people are involved. One third of young people in Spain are unemployed, and Germany is nearing a post-war unemployment record. France has a huge number of unemployed people. How long can political peace be kept when unemployment is rising so hugely, and for what? It is not for some great economic advance, but for the political dream of a small political intelligentsia, or so-called intelligentsia. That cannot be the way to maintain stability in Europe.

A dangerous game is being played, and we must try to inject a note of realism into the debate. If we do not, there will be dire consequences not just for the United Kingdom but for the whole of Europe. Much of the good that has been achieved in Europe is in danger of being swept away by the political arrogance of those who think that they know better.

Mr. Winterton: The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made an excellent speech, and my hon. Friend is building an unbeatable case against the single currency. Does he share my suspicion that the Government are using high interest rates and the problems that they create for industries across the spectrum, from agriculture to manufacturing, to blackmail people into supporting a single currency as the only way to get lower interest rates, although that is a totally false prospectus?

Dr. Fox: I am persuaded up to a point by my hon. Friend's case, but it gives the Government the benefit of the doubt on economic competence, which I do not believe they possess. They are now out of control in terms of both the domestic economy and the European argument. They do not know where they are. They have become destabilised and lack equilibrium. None of what we have heard tonight convinces me that the Government have any idea how they will gain control again.

There are only two possible routes for Europe to take: it can be either a free-market Europe or a fortress Europe. We in the United Kingdom have always seen the European Union as a stepping stone to world trade liberalisation. This week's comments by Newt Gingrich show that he is one of the people who wants wider trade liberalisation. We in the UK have always wanted that.

When we convinced people to vote for membership of the European Economic Community, it was because we believed in trade liberalisation. It was to be part of a common market. An ever-expanding common market must be the first step to greater trade opportunities, but some of our European partners do not see it that way.

[Dr. Fox]

They view the European Union as a means of protecting themselves from harsh economic world competitive conditions.

Those two routes are not compatible. There will be either a free-market Europe or a fortress Europe, and we in the UK must understand what the parameters of our European policy are to be if we are not to disadvantage our long-term economic and trading position.

We are always told, "We can't be left behind"—that is always the excuse. When we refused to sign the social chapter in the Maastricht treaty, of which the Economic Secretary is so fond, we were told, "You must sign it because we shall be left behind." Indeed, we were left behind. We were left behind the high unemployment to which the right hon. Member for Chesterfield referred; we had low unemployment. We were left behind the inflexible economies that now afflict Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy; we had a flexible economy, which has responded extremely well.

When the Government try to take credit for falling unemployment, it is the ultimate hypocrisy. We have falling unemployment because we made our supply-side reforms to create a flexible economy, in the teeth of Labour opposition. The Prime Minister voted in the House of Commons against every policy that he now goes to Europe on and that he tells our European partners they must follow. It is utter humbug. I know that those policies are incredibly distasteful to Labour Members, but not many of them bother to vote against the Government.

The convergence criteria are the ultimate farce. At some point, some day, somewhere in the European Union, we shall have to recognise that these are the emperor's new clothes. The convergence criteria are a complete farce. Bringing Belgium and Italy into the single currency can do nothing but make it unstable, and that instability will give no comfort to anyone on any side of the political debate in the UK, because a bad single currency will be bad for the European economy and, consequently, for the UK.

Although—the Economic Secretary has again failed to get her figures right—most of our trade is outside the European Union, as the Foreign Secretary confirmed, a large proportion of it is within the EU. It is in our interest to have a successful economic EU, but the soft currency that is now threatened pushes sterling up further and threatens the European economy itself.

If we have a soft currency—because Italy and Belgium are members of the single currency—it will be largely because we have a Prime Minister who is more fond of photo opportunities, getting his horses and getting a good reception in Europe than taking a long-term view of this country's economic well-being. If we end up with a soft currency, it will be because the Government have failed to take hard decisions. That will earn the contempt of generations to come.

The final point made by the Economic Secretary was on an issue on which I have asked her many written questions—the hon. Lady will be well aware of this—and it concerns the currency of denomination of trade. Why are the Government so obsessed with getting to the convergence criteria, when the evidence produced by the Treasury and the Economic Secretary's answer to me only weeks ago showed that the currency position in 1989, when Britain traded 89 per cent. in sterling and dollars and only 4 per cent. in deutschmarks, has not changed over the past 10 years? There is no economic logic in linking ourselves with a European currency in which we do hardly any trade. Most of our trade is done in sterling and dollars.

In fact, it is worse than that.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: Sit down.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman is telling me to sit down because he does not like to hear complicated arguments that are not conducted in monosyllables.

If we go into a single currency when we are still trading mainly in dollars, we shall hand over a trading advantage to our European competitors. While they will have the security of not having currency fluctuations outwith the European Union and the currencies in which it trades, we shall still be subject as much to euro-dollar fluctuation as we are to sterling-dollar fluctuation. That will be a major disadvantage to this country unless the currency of denomination of trade changes fundamentally.

Many good things have occurred in Europe over recent years and the Government's policies risk throwing them all away. Blind adherence to the political and economic fashion of an economic and European political intelligentsia risks many economic fallouts, including political instability within Europe and economic catastrophe in this country. I urge the Government, while they still have time, to take the tough decisions, to try to get the single currency to be strong and not to risk a catastrophe in the European economy that will impact on this country. If they allow that to happen, they will risk the contempt of generations and they will deserve it.

11.37 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) because it is sad to see a new generation of Conservatives denying the realities of their own Government of the 1980s and 1990s. I was one of those who tramped through the Lobby against the Maastricht treaty and against the decisions of the Conservative Government in conspiracy with the Labour party.

The convergence document is one of the greatest works of fiction I have seen since I participated in the internet story in the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*. It was called "Future Perfect" and I made a contribution of 500 words. It is now to be published as a book. That was a great work of science fiction and this document is a great work of economic fiction. Attempting to reduce this Euro-farce to the pathetic level of party political games serves no useful purpose.

We have a real problem. Essentially, in trying to go ahead with monetary union, which is the only way to build the sort of political union that is wanted, the exchange rate is being used as a political instrument. That is distorting the exchange rate and its purposes and damaging consequences will result. If two economies—one extremely powerful and well invested and the other weaker—are put together without the cushioning of the exchange rate between them to insulate the economy and to take the shocks rather than the shocks occurring to wage rates and living standards, the stronger economy rips the weaker economy apart. It is as simple as that. That is the reality.

If there is to be monetary union, there have to be defined characteristics in terms of the strength of the economies. Europe has characteristics that are defined in monetarist terms—inflation rates and debt levels. It is now going on from that initial mistake to fudge the very criteria that it set. The convergence document is a colossal fudge. The picture on the front of the Budget Red Book could be the President of the Commission, Jacques Santer, lying on the floor with a new generation of Britons looking down on him. It seems to be a case of, "Roll up, roll up. Everybody is welcome." It is rather like me, with my generously proportioned figure, trying to fit into a Paul Smith suit—because I desperately want to be new Labour, to be fashionable, to be trendy—to make me appropriate for new Labour. Frankly, I would have to lie down on the floor to pull up the trousers. I would have to struggle to get the zip up or to get the jacket to meet; I would have to wear a corset before I could wear the suit.

Europe is being pushed into the same situation by the convergence criteria, which are artificial. As soon as I breathed in my Paul Smith suit, it would rip apart at the seams. That is exactly what will happen with monetary union. It will have to be a success, because for years the unemployment rate in France has been between 12.6 and 12.8 per cent. One cannot go to the French electorate as a French socialist Government and say, "Hélas, on s'est trompé. Sans blague, on s'est trompé." One cannot express one's regrets and say that it was all a mistake. Governments have to persevere, and they will, but because the criteria have been fudged, it will all come apart quicker.

Everything is fudged. In fact, only little Luxembourg fits the criteria perfectly. By any calculation Germany exceeds the 3 per cent. target for its public sector deficit. The Italians have complied only by a one-off Euro tax, which will not be repeated next year. It is not repeatable. These deficits are not sustainable, because with high unemployment public spending will increase.

The inflation figures for Spain have been fudged. If long-term debt has to be 60 per cent. of gross domestic product, what about Belgium, where it is about 128 per cent., or Italy, where it is 125 per cent.? It is all very well to say that one has to make progress towards the target. Progress towards the 60 per cent. target seems likely over several decades, but is certainly not possible within any sensible time span. If those countries are to make progress, massive deflation will be imposed on them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was perfectly correct. We are being fitted into the same criteria, and that is having a disastrous effect on what we as a Labour Government want and need to achieve to serve our people. We want to expand the economy. We want to improve public spending. We want economic growth, yet for some reason we are trying to observe the Maastricht criteria. It is not the responsibility of a Labour Government to run a low deficit and start repaying debt.

Our responsibility is to solve the problems of the people, and that demands an expansion of the economy to generate public spending, not cuts to achieve something that is hypothetical. It is not the purpose of the people to make the Bank of England independent and give it control over interest rates, which have a disastrous effect on the exchange rate and on manufacturing, which is on the front line of intense international competition.

The purpose of the people is about jobs. It is not the purpose of a Labour Government—the people's Government after all—to set an inflation target, which at 2.5 per cent. is far too tight, above any other objectives, whether they be jobs, economic growth or anything that advances the causes of the people. This is monetarist folly. Why are we doing it? The only explanation seems to be a desire to fit into the Maastricht convergence criteria. We clearly will go ahead with monetary union, because people are not going to say, "Sans blague, on s'est trompé; tant pis." Will we observe the stability pact, with all the restrictions on public spending? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield said, it has all the freedom of a rate-capped council. That is not the responsibility or the role of a Labour Government, who should be serving the people.

Why is the exchange rate being kept at its current high level? Why do we not intervene to bring it down? Why have we given the Bank of England control of the exchange rate before the Bank of England Bill has been passed, while we could still change the targets or intervene to bring down the exchange rate? Is it all some kind of preparation for monetary union? I honestly do not understand. It is either an amazing coincidence that we are adopting all these policies now, or it is a deliberate attempt to meet the convergence criteria.

We are embarking on this process which is nothing other than self-crucifixion because these policies are undermining and damaging the real economy of manufacturing and jobs. Next year, we shall face severe deflation just when we are going to the country in the May elections. While we are doing this, in Europe there is clearly a deliberate policy to depreciate the deutschmark. The deutschmark is being brought down to make it competitive. To offset the consequences of the deflation necessary to achieve the Maastricht criteria, the Germans are deliberately depreciating the deutschmark to make their exports more competitive on our market. That will lead to a widening of the balance of payments deficit with Germany, which has always been substantial.

If we did that, it would be called competitive devaluation. We would be castigated and hauled up for it. It would be considered monstrous that "les sales Anglais" were behaving in this traditional, perfidious Albion fashion, but because the Germans are doing it, it makes economic sense and is acceptable. That is a signal that the euro, when it comes, is going to be run as a soft currency to maintain expansion, to make it competitive and effective, and to ease the transition. We could cope with a hard currency, but the euro will be run as a soft currency. That will undercut us and worsen our trading position with Germany and, indeed, with the whole of Europe, which is already disastrous enough.

A soft euro is the scenario that I fear. I want to know from the Government what we are going to do when the euro is run as a soft currency. Are we going to maintain sterling at the current level and carry on with this destructive approach to British industry, watching the balance of payments deficit widen? We shall get no benefit at all in that situation. We are already getting very little benefit from the single market. It is interesting that since the single market was introduced, our trade outside it has expanded far more rapidly than our trade inside it.

It is clear that Europe's approach is to fudge and fiddle. The euro may work, I do not know; we certainly have to try to make it work. However, the Government need to

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

tell us whether, faced with a soft euro, a widening deficit, a challenge to jobs and employment, and the threat posed to our industry by the pound's exchange rate, we are going to keep the present exchange rate, or whether we are going to intervene to get it down. We have to do something. We cannot sail on towards the rapids as we are now, blithely saying that we are providing stability, even if stability means an exchange rate depreciation of 30 per cent. over less than two years, which is exactly what has happened.

What are we going to do about sterling and the exchange rate? Are we going to observe the stability pact and maintain the overtight control of public spending when the nation elected us to make things better? We were elected not to maintain the Maastricht criteria or to cut public spending, but to make better everything that had been affected by the anorexia and the cuts of 18 years of Tory government. Can we now embark on that job or are we putting the Maastricht criteria and the stability pact first? What will happen and how will we run the economy in those circumstances?

I do not want our Labour Government, with all our bright hopes and desires for improvement, to march back—as we are doing now—into the old deflationary trap of cuts to justify inflation and to maintain the exchange rate at an overvalued level. Industry is suffering from the decline that results from an overvalued exchange rate and all the sacrifice is imposed not on the fat cats that we could tax, but on the people of this county in pursuit of some European ideal that they do not share.

11.50 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words in the last few minutes of a debate that has gained some distinction from the fact that hon. Members have spoken independently, without a party script. In particular, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), with whose views I disagree, spoke briefly and cogently on the subject. The key difference between today's debate and other debates on monetary union is that we are dealing for the first time with reality rather than with a hypothetical project. In Britain it is not often appreciated that monetary union has been planned systematically, step by step, since the early 1970s. Anyone with sufficient clarity of vision can see that there was a real commitment to making it happen. It was not simply the invention of Chancellor Kohl and contemporary politicians; it has been planned for a long time. People in Britain—particularly Conservative Members—suffer from blindness, myopia or unwillingness to face up to that fact.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): What about Parliament? Would the hon. Gentleman concede that the myopia of which he accuses Conservative Members—and presumably Labour Members too—is not the issue? The issue is that, although that agenda may well have been clear in the minds of the hon. Gentleman and others in Europe, it was never made clear to the people in Europe—not just in Britain. As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said, the people in each of the countries in Europe were duped because that mission and message was not made clear to them honestly.

Dr. Cable: Like us, they have democratically elected Governments all of whom are campaigning within the context of a commitment to the European ideal and European monetary union.

The key issues that confront us, and the two particular matters that we need to address, are the extent to which the European countries have achieved the basic criteria for monetary union and the extent to which the British Government have progressed towards convergence.

Mr. Paterson: The hon. Gentleman has missed a critical point that was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes). The project is provoking excitement among most unpleasant extreme political parties in Europe. In France, for instance, no main political party does not support the project, with the result that, in recent regional elections, there has been a sharp increase in support for Le Pen's national front party. Similarly, in Austria, only Jorg Haider's party stands for an independent Austria instead of the country's being put into the pressure cooker of a united European state.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was quite long enough for an intervention at this hour of the night.

Dr. Cable: I was about to progress from politics to the market, which is what Conservative Members believe in. The key point about convergence in Europe is not what is in the document or our individual judgments, but what happens in the markets. I do not know whether Conservative Members have been studying what is happening to long-term bond yields in Europe. One of the key points in recent months is that the differential between all the participating countries in EMU has disappeared. There is virtually no divergence between the long-term bond markets in Italy and Germany.

Another key factor is the relationship with our own market. The rate of the bond yield in Italy is now lower than in the UK or the US. What is the significance of that? What is the market trying to say? The market is telling us clearly—in a transparent, non-political way—that there is a greater prospect of long-term stability in Italy than in the UK or the US. The markets have indicated clearly that a process of convergence is taking place, and that is reinforced by the numbers.

We must make a balanced assessment of what the convergence process in Europe has produced. It is a mixed story, and there are particular areas—notably, public debt in Italy—where the conditions have not been satisfied. However, overwhelmingly, they have been. The key point relates to inflation, which is now—according to the convergence report—averaging under 2 per cent. across Europe; that is well within what we expected a few years ago. The standard deviation is very low, and it is inflation that really matters. Differences in price levels would create stresses within monetary union, but they have been eliminated.

The average public sector deficit within the European Union is now well under 3 per cent., and the differences between member states are very small. All member states,

except two, have had two years of stability—in many cases, many more years—within the framework of exchange rate stability. The key criteria have been met.

The Economic Secretary correctly sketched out those areas of economic policy in which we are moving in the direction of economic stability—our inflation objectives, the deficit, institutional development through a central bank, and the fiscal stability arrangements.

The one key element of instability left—it has been the core of the argument tonight—relates to the exchange rate. Conservative Members in particular deplore what they regard as the overvalued exchange rate. The key question is, "What do we do about it?" People have argued simultaneously for devaluation and for a strong currency. It is not clear what they want.

I suggest that we need two mechanisms to help us address the problem. First, the Government should made clear now roughly the rate of exchange at which Britain will enter EMU within a few years. One can argue that it could be in the range of DM2.80 to DM3. A pre-announcement of an exchange rate would have a stabilising effect on the market and would be a significant contributory factor to stability.

The final point that I wish to make—this is an element which brings together people on both sides of the argument—is that the process requires greater political legitimacy. That is why my party and I believe that we need a referendum—and we need it soon. A referendum could not only confer democratic legitimacy on monetary union, but could create the option for the Government to proceed with early entry, which is rapidly becoming a realistic and desirable objective.

11.57 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): It did not surprise me at all that the Economic Secretary failed properly to discuss the issue of convergence, given that the views of her own Back Benchers would have been at variance with her own. What she failed to mention—

It being one and half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

The House proceeded to a Division—

MR. CLIVE BETTS *and* JANE KENNEDY *were appointed Tellers for the Ayes but no Member being willing to act as Teller for the Noes,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Ayes had it.*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1998–99 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

NORTHERN IRELAND (ELECTIONS) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—[*Mr. Robert Ainsworth.*]

NORTHERN IRELAND (ELECTIONS) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill:

TIMING OF PROCEEDINGS

1.—(1) Proceedings on the bill shall be completed at the sitting on Wednesday 22nd April.

(2) Proceedings on Second Reading shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

(3) Remaining proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of proceedings on Second Reading.

(4) Standing Order 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at the sitting on 22nd April.

2.—(1) When the Bill has been read a second time—

(a) it shall, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put,

(b) proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed while the Question is put, in accordance with Standing Order No. 52(1) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills), on any financial resolution relating to the Bill,

(c) on the conclusion of proceedings on any financial resolution relating to the Bill, proceedings on the Bill shall be resumed and the Speaker shall leave the chair whether or not notice of an instruction has been given.

(2) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question; and if he reports the Bill with Amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

QUESTIONS TO BE PUT

3.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion for a new Clause or Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If two or more Questions would fall to be put by the Chairman under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions.

MISCELLANEOUS

4. If at the sitting on 22nd April—

(a) a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over to seven o'clock, and

(b) proceedings on the Bill have begun before that time,

the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings in accordance with paragraph 1 shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

5.—(1) No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

(2) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment.

6. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

7.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced; and Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(2) If at the sitting on 22nd April the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraph 1, no notice shall be required of a Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.—[*Mr. Robert Ainsworth.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

HOVERCRAFT

That the draft Hovercraft (Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims (Amendment)) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims) (Amendment) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

HOVERCRAFT

That the draft Hovercraft (Application of Enactments) (Amendment) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.—[*Mr. Robert Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

INFORMATION SOCIETY

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 13289/97, a Commission Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors, and the implications for regulation: Towards an Information Society Approach; shares the Commission's assessment of the importance of convergence to support the development of the information society; welcomes the Commission's recognition that the development of convergence provides substantial opportunities for job creation and growth; and notes that the Government intends shortly to launch a consultation on the future regulation of broadcasting and telecommunications in the United Kingdom.—[*Mr. Robert Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

A47 (Dualling)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

12.1 am

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Way back in 1971, the Government of the day first published plans for a high-capacity road network, which included the dualling of the A47 from King's Lynn to Great Yarmouth. In 1978, the strategic route approach was watered down, and, to all intents and purposes, replaced by proposals to build bypasses on key stretches of the road.

In 1980, the European dimension was introduced—the then Government submitted the A47 as a route of European significance to the EC. Eight years on, with not a contractor's vehicle in sight, Great Yarmouth produced a document called "Acle New Road: the Case for Dualling". The document was accompanied by a supporting petition signed by 20,000 people. A year on, in 1989, another small section of the rain forest died in vain, when the Thatcher Government produced the White Paper "Roads to Prosperity", which included a commitment to dual the A47 for its entire length between Peterborough and Great Yarmouth.

Five more years rolled by, until the next review, "Trunk Roads in England", was produced. That work of art returned the prospects for the A47 to the 1978 position. The all-too-familiar story of limited resources was cited as the reason for that backward step, although the Norwich southern bypass was built at a cost of about £86 million.

The story of dualling the Acle straight is rather like a game of snakes and ladders, except that there are no ladders, and, even after 27 years, the game has not left the first square. Predictably, the next roll of the dice produced another snake—the "Managing the Trunk Programme" document further restricted plans to improve the A47.

That left only two schemes, Thorney and Hardwick, in the programme. Seven schemes, including Acle and Blofield, were relegated to the longer-term programme, and the disastrous news that they were to be scrapped altogether came in 1996. Ironically, the A47 was accepted as a trans-European route in that year.

That was all against a background of rapid growth in the eastern region, which is growing faster than any other region in the country. Traffic growth between 1983 and 1989, the years before the big recession, was 50 per cent. in East Anglia, compared with an average of 32 per cent. in the country as a whole. Unfortunately, Great Yarmouth has not benefited from the success of the rest of the region. Along with Wisbech, it was designated an assisted area.

The A47 is recognised as a key strategic route for the regeneration of the area in both regional strategies and county structure plans. Despite the relative poverty and poor trading position of Great Yarmouth, the Acle straight exceeded the Department of Transport's minimum level of traffic required for dualling of 11,000 vehicles a day and the so-called acceptable upper limit for single carriageway, at 13,000 vehicles a day, way back in 1993.

The latest available figures, for 1996, show that 15,997 vehicles a day used the Acle straight—a rise of about 3,000 on the 1993 figure. Unfortunately, the increase in traffic flow does not indicate an increase in commercial activity. More slow-moving traffic has simply increased journey times, and led to the haemorrhage of business from Great Yarmouth to competitor ports.

Given the lethal combination of large numbers of slow-moving cars and lorries and a long, straight stretch of road on which the judgment of distance is difficult, it is hardly surprising that the accident rate is much higher than the national average. Even back in the early 1990s, the figures were appalling. There were 31 fatalities on all the undualled sections of the A47 between 1991 and 1994. The Acle straight has been the scene of four fatal accidents, eight serious accidents and 32 slight accidents, resulting in 88 casualties, in the past three years.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I offer my support to the hon. Gentleman, as my constituents are deeply concerned about the lack of dualling on the area of the A47 between Blofield and Lingwood, and the effect that it is having on road casualties. I want to reinforce his point about the economic impact, which affects both Great Yarmouth and Norfolk more widely. It is very important that the whole of the A47 is dualled.

Mr. Wright: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments. It is only a pity that many of his colleagues in the previous Government did not take the same attitude. In 18 years of Tory government, no fewer than 23 Ministers with the roads portfolio said that there was a definite need for dualling, but the Acle straight was withdrawn from the scheme in 1996.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are also environmental problems around the site? I know the area well from travelling to the James Pagett hospital for breast cancer research. There are special environmental problems with animals and plants. Does my hon. Friend concede that those problems must be considered before the road is dualled?

Mr. Wright: That is indeed the case. All the councils, and certainly the Members of Parliament, recognise the need for environmental protection. I will touch on that a little later.

The cost of accidents on the two stretches alone amounted to more than £8 million between 1991 and 1994. It has been estimated that the overall saving per annum of dualling all the remaining single carriageway on the A47 to the A1 could be as much as £5.9 million through the reduction in accidents alone.

The cost in human lives lost could be dramatically reduced by dualling, as statistics show that rural roads—single carriageways—produce 50 deaths per 100 million vehicle kilometres, compared with 17 for motorway or dualled carriageway. Dualling should cut the death rate to one third of the present total, which is the strongest reason for taking action as soon as possible.

Various studies of the local economy have shown that the poor standard of roads can be a significant disincentive to investment. Major job losses in Great Yarmouth in the 1980s and early 1990s have illustrated that point. It is one of the few major ports, offshore and tourism centres that is not linked to the national dual carriageway network, despite its proximity to Europe.

There is no doubt that the prospects and competitiveness of the port are being adversely affected by the inadequacies of the existing road network.

[Mr. Wright]

Evidence of that fact is the departure of the haulage company Norfolk Line, which ceased its Great Yarmouth operation in the early 1990s and now operates out of the rival port of Felixstowe. Once again, valuable jobs were lost, and Great Yarmouth's case for the construction of an outer harbour to accommodate larger vessels was further damaged. Great Yarmouth needs to be linked to the main strategic highway arteries if it is to overcome severe problems of deprivation, high unemployment and peripherality.

Of course I recognise the need for an improvement in the rail rink; indeed, I support the case made by Great Yarmouth borough council and the local business community for improved strategic rail links, including the encouragement and promotion of an east-west rail link between East Anglia and Oxford or Swindon. That measure, together with the radical improvements in through ticketing arrangements, is keenly sought by the people of Great Yarmouth. However, such measures should be introduced in parallel with road improvements, not as a substitute.

The campaign for the dualling of the A47 Acle straight has been supported by Norfolk county council, the relevant district councils, the port authority and local companies throughout the Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft region. The A47 Alliance, campaigning for the improvement of the A47 as a whole, received support from more than 500 companies, with the most vocal supporters coming from Great Yarmouth.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): The most vocal support that my hon. Friend hears might be from Yarmouth, but I can assure him that, 70 or 80 miles away in King's Lynn at the other end of Norfolk, industrialists on the estates, who were promised 18 and 20 years ago that they would have a good road network, with connections to the national network, are very loud in the ears of their local Member. One of the features of our part of East Anglia is that we need the whole of the A47 dualled.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The debate is moving a little further than it should, out of the territory of concern to the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright).

Mr. Wright: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) for his comments. The A47 starts at Yarmouth, and our one strength is the support that we have received not only from the Great Yarmouth area, but from all the district councils within Norfolk and from down the coast at Lowestoft. The A47 Acle straight is a vital part of the infrastructure needs, not only of Great Yarmouth but of north-west Norfolk. One of the strengths of our campaign was the support across the political spectrum, the business community throughout the whole of Norfolk, the local councils, and authorities throughout the eastern region as well as Norfolk.

To return to the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) about the environmental implications of dualling the Acle straight, the Broads authority is the body with primary responsibility for the well-being of the area affected by the straight. After discussion in Great Yarmouth, the authority resolved to seek an agreed position with Great Yarmouth council as follows:

"Norfolk County Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council and the Broads Authority agree to the principle of dualling the A47 Acle Straight and the rail electrification, to be implemented at the earliest opportunity, subject to the following: a) that these schemes should be designated, evaluated and implemented fully in compliance with the advice of PPG13 Transport; b) that these schemes be designed and implemented in a manner which complies with the advice in PPG9 'Nature Conservation' and avoids a significant adverse effect on the ecological value of Damgate Marshes SSSI, taking into account any appropriate mitigating measures to be implemented with the schemes; c) that these schemes should be designed and implemented in a manner which minimises any adverse effects on the Broads environment, including the nature conservation interest, the landscape and important buildings and also taking full account of the agricultural interests of the area."

The scheme's environmental impact has been examined.

It is important to realise that the people of Great Yarmouth are asking not for a totally new road but for the dualling of an existing highway. If it had involved a new road, I would have opposed the scheme, but dualling would affect only some 30 yd alongside existing highways. I hope that the recent visit of the Minister of Transport will provide a much-needed ladder in this game of snakes and ladders. I sincerely hope that the mission statement on the future of Yarmouth will give the Acle straight dualling scheme the boost that it badly needs.

People say that Great Yarmouth is out on a limb, and perhaps it is, but limbs need clear, efficient arteries to keep them in good health. Great Yarmouth's artery is the A47, and it needs surgery desperately.

12.15 am

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Can the hon. Gentleman assure me that he has the permission of the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) and the Minister to make this speech?

Mr. Blizzard: I can.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) for giving me a few minutes. Less than nine miles to the south of Great Yarmouth lies the port of Lowestoft. The A47 is the main east-west link between Lowestoft and the midlands and the north. Lowestoft's arguments for improvements to the A47 are identical to those of Great Yarmouth.

Like Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft exists because it is a port. That is why it was founded, and why the town has grown up. Now it is a port where life is hard. It should not be that way, because the port points straight at Europe. It is Britain's most easterly port. The job of a port is to integrate sea and land transport. Ports are essential elements of an integrated transport policy, and essential to Britain successfully competing in Europe, but they cannot perform their function unless there are modern land routes to and from them. The roads to Lowestoft, such as the A47, are unmodernised. The railways are worse.

Only yesterday, a European visitor told me about a trip from Leeds to Lowestoft along the A47, and described the road as being of third-world standard. The economic consequences for Lowestoft are the same as those for Yarmouth. Unemployment is still more than 9 per cent.

We have lost firms, with few replacements. We do not even have assisted area status. Our main port user is moving operations to Hull—the constituency of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The reason given is Hull's good dualled road links.

There was a time when road links to Lowestoft and Yarmouth were as good as those of the rest of the country, but most of the rest of the country has been modernised; we have been left behind. I do not believe that we should carry on widening motorways, but we should modernise roads such as the Acle straight, which would breathe new life into my town and into that of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth. Together, the population of our constituencies is about 200,000. Those people need a future. We must not continue to be abandoned, as we were by the previous Government. Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth deserve better.

12.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) on securing this debate. Clearly, the dualling of the A47 Acle straight is a matter of importance not only in his constituency but over a much wider area. That was demonstrated by the contributions that my hon. Friend so generously allowed not only from my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) but from the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson).

I know of the concerns, which were expressed most cogently, that Great Yarmouth's relatively remote location and lack of high-quality links adversely affect its economy and development prospects.

Before I deal with the A47, it may be helpful to the House if I say something about how the roads review fits into the overall thrust of our integrated transport policies, and the stage that we have reached in the consultation process. The Government are committed to developing a sustainable and integrated transport policy that will tackle the serious problems of congestion and pollution that we face.

We are aiming at a shift away from fragmented provision of infrastructure and services to an integrated approach that will serve the country's needs for a strong economy, a sustainable environment and an inclusive society. Good communications are essential to delivering those aims, but we must reduce our dependence on the car and lorry if we are not to be choked by increasing pollution and gridlocked by increasing congestion.

I am pleased to say that there has been a great deal of interest in the major consultation exercise that we conducted last year. Some 6,700 replies were received in England alone. We are currently engaged in the development of an integrated approach to transport, and will publish our conclusions and policies in our transport White Paper later in the year.

In addition to our consultation paper, and in order to encourage debate about the needs and priorities in each area, we organise seminars on a regional basis. This approach is very much in line with our intention to strengthen the English regions and encourage partnerships, co-ordination of programmes and local decision making.

As part of the roads review consultation exercise for the eastern region, which includes my hon. Friend's constituency, the Government office conducted two seminars for local transport authorities, business and environmental interests, at which every trunk road in the region was examined in detail. The results of that exercise were fed into a regional conference on integrated transport on 23 October, attended by well over 200 delegates. This process allowed time for delegates to contribute to the consultation following these events.

On 3 December, my noble Friend the Minister for Roads invited all hon. Members from constituencies in the eastern region to hear a summary of the consultation results and to put their points directly to her. I know that my noble Friend found the meeting very useful in helping her to understand the particular problems of the region.

I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth attended the meeting, and I hope that he also found it useful. He made the point there that the lack of good dual-carriageway access to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft was making it especially difficult to attract and retain investment—points that he made most cogently again tonight, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney. The Government office for the eastern region has received more than 400 letters about the trunk road schemes in the region.

The A47 is a significant inter-regional route between the midlands and East Anglia. The section between the A1 at Peterborough and Great Yarmouth, through Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, is of particular significance to East Anglia. Great Yarmouth on the east coast is the major town in my hon. Friend's constituency. The importance, although he found it somewhat ironic, of the A47 is recognised by its classification as part of the trans-European road network connecting the heart of England to the east coast ports.

The A11 to Norwich and the A47 east of Norwich also form a key route, providing access to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft from the south and west. The regional consultation on the roads review identified the highest priority for the region as completion of dualling of that route, to open up the north and east of the region and contribute to regeneration and economic development there.

Considerable progress has been made in solving some of the problems on the A47. Over £150 million has been invested in A47 improvements in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk in the past 10 years. That is a considerable amount, indicating the importance attached to the route. A number of bypasses and other improvements have been opened to traffic west of Norwich. Norwich southern bypass, the Postwick-Blofield improvement and Acle bypass have continued the improvements made to the A11-A47 route.

Those, like my hon. Friend, who seek major improvements to the A47 have had their hopes built up only to be dashed as the roads programme was expanded and then contracted by the previous Administration. It has been a somewhat frustrating game of snakes and ladders, as my hon. Friend said, and I can well understand the frustration of the local communities that he so cogently expressed. We decided that, unlike previous road programme reviews, our review should be conducted as openly as possible.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

Our objective is to produce from the roads review an investment programme which supports our integrated transport strategy and delivers clear benefits against each of our five criteria of safety, accessibility, the environment, integration and the economy. We therefore intend that the output of the roads review should include, first, a short-term investment programme, and, secondly, a programme of studies to look at the remaining problems, from which we will develop the medium and longer-term investment programme.

To help us decide what should go into the short-term investment programme, we have developed a new appraisal framework that will enable us to see how far each proposal will tackle the problem in question, and how it will measure up against the five review criteria. We are not anti-car; we recognise that there are some problems to which road construction is the only answer. However, before we sign up to a new road building programme, we want to be clear that all other options have been considered, including public transport improvements, demand management, traffic management and better driver information.

Only a limited number of projects across the country are sufficiently advanced to allow them to be considered as candidates for the short-term programme. Elsewhere, we shall seek to put a programme of studies into place, some to look at specific problem areas and others to look at wider transport corridors. The emphasis will be on involving a range of local interests in identifying problems and finding solutions.

We are very much aware of the pressure for improvements to be made to the section of the A47, the Acle straight. To the south of the A47 between Acle and Great Yarmouth lies the Damgate marshes site of special scientific interest, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend. The bulk of the Norfolk broads has been put forward as a candidate for designation as a special area of conservation, and that might be extended to include the Damgate marshes SSSI, in view of the existence of rare communities of freshwater plants. Should the site receive such status under the European Community habitats directive, it would obviously have a bearing on the promotion of any scheme to improve that section of A47.

The Government and the Highways Agency regard the safety of all road users as one of their highest priorities, and the agency monitors all accidents on the network to determine whether there are clusters where changes to signing or the road layout or other safety measures could make the road safer.

Two local schemes are proposed on the section of A47 in 1998-99. In September, the agency will be carrying out a highway maintenance scheme to resurface a section of the carriageway, improve drainage and introduce new kerbing. There are also proposals to erect a speed camera to help to enforce the speed limit and reduce speed-related accidents. Although there are no other proposals for network enhancement or local safety schemes on this section of the A47 in the current financial year, the agency will continue to monitor the operation of the A47 very closely to determine whether any other improvements can be identified and brought forward in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth mentioned the accident record of the section of A47 between Blofield and Acle. The Highways Agency is fully aware of the accident history, and has commissioned a study to look into the causes of accidents on that section of the A47, as well as that at the Beighton White House junction. The purpose of the study is to identify low-cost remedial measures to solve the accident problems. The study work is currently being completed, and the agency hopes to receive the final study report shortly. The nature of any future network enhancement or local safety schemes will depend upon the recommendations made in the study. The agency will keep my hon. Friend informed of progress.

Turning to local transport within east Norfolk, we are expecting a new package bid from Norfolk county council for Great Yarmouth. That will be a development from last year's bid, which we were not able to accept; it will concentrate on sustainable transport measures to aid regeneration and the management of tourist traffic.

Norfolk county council is also developing a transport strategy for the Norfolk coast, which could lead to a further bid for package funding. Norfolk already has a successful package under way in Norwich, with another major park-and-ride site at Postwick due to open in May. In February of this year, the county council's joint conference with the Countryside Commission addressed the problems of rural traffic, and balancing transport needs with the need to maintain the environmental quality of the area. Those are issues relevant to the forthcoming transport White Paper.

On the question of regeneration, Great Yarmouth borough council, working with English Partnerships and others, has proposals for industrial development in the South Gorleston area. We are at present considering an application for grant under section 13 of the Industrial Development Act 1985 to aid the development of the site. Resource limitations may restrict our ability to accept new package bids, but the work being done in Great Yarmouth and in north Norfolk is developing a practical, integrated strategy emphasising the role of environmentally friendly modes.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing these matters to the attention of the House. I very much welcome the debate and the points made by all hon. Members about the environmental, safety and economic problems caused by the lack of high-quality routes to north-east Norfolk. We shall take those points into account as we complete the roads review, and I assure all hon. Members that we shall give them due consideration and weight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 April 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Energy Policy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am pleased to be able to open this debate on energy policy following the Kyoto summit. I do so as part of an effective parliamentary conspiracy known as the GLOBE group, which stands for Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment, which has members in all Parliaments in Europe and, indeed, in many Parliaments throughout the world. We view effective lobbying in national Parliaments as part of our work, but also aim to ensure that major events such as the Kyoto conference are followed by effective parliamentary action, so that all national Governments keep to their targets.

It could not be more appropriate that we are debating this issue today because, tomorrow, the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry will sit before the Environmental Audit Committee, which will question him at some length about the methods by which the Government will carry out the policies that were agreed at Kyoto. That is a step forward: this Parliament now has a Select Committee where such questions can be raised.

In the past, environmental policies were entirely linked to the Department of the Environment, which was obviously heavily dominated by local government interests. Because of that domination, environmental matters tended to take a back seat. It would be useful if Parliament as a whole had a specialist environment Committee—as opposed to a Committee linking other Departments—in addition to the Environmental Audit Committee. There is a strong case for that.

In June, European Union Ministers will meet in Aarhus in Denmark to discuss the continuation of environmental policies, but we must take other things into account. For example, there are headlines in all today's newspapers about the transport of plutonium waste from Georgia to Britain. That exposes the dangers of nuclear waste and nuclear reprocessing, and effectively challenges all those who believe that the nuclear option is somehow safe and environmentally sustainable, and will ensure clean energy supplies.

I do not believe that there is anything clean about nuclear waste or nuclear power. If anyone proposed that we should start a new energy source that would be dangerous for more than 1,000 years, people would think that they were completely mad. It is time that we seriously challenged the whole nuclear argument.

This Friday, the House has the opportunity to complete the stages in this place of the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, which has been through Committee. It is a great tribute to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) that it has got that far. I just hope that certain members of the Conservative parliamentary party do not go on yet another outing of trying to destroy an environmental Bill, as they have unfortunately tried to do on various other occasions. The Energy Efficiency Bill is also coming up this Friday. It is important that the House puts together all those issues, so that we have joined-up thinking and joined-up actions in improving our environment.

In many ways, the Kyoto conference was a great milestone in this planet's history. Before Rio, many people throughout the world had been arguing for a more sustainable attitude towards our environment, energy consumption and energy production, but it had not come together. The Rio summit was a major turning point. Likewise, the New York meeting and Kyoto were a major step forward in recognising the limits to growth and to what we can do to our environment and planet, and placed requirements on each country to carry out the work.

However, the background to Kyoto was raging fires throughout south Asia, which were caused partly by drought, but partly because people were seeking to clear forests by burning them down. The news now is that, despite all the campaigning by so many people throughout the world over the past 20 years, the rate of destruction of that huge carbon sink otherwise known as the beautiful Amazon rain forest is proceeding at an even faster rate than ever before. There is no room for complacency in energy policy or environmental protection matters.

The world might look with great hope to Kyoto, post-Rio and all that goes with that, but all Governments appear to be accepting that there is an uncontrollable global economy and that growth is the order of the day. The environmental damage done by excessive transportation, excessive destruction of forests and excessive use of fossil fuels appears to be viewed as the necessary consequence of the eternal growth theory. Therefore, humankind has a long way to go in trying to control what it does to this planet, as, at present, it is merely trying to mitigate the effects on the globe of a free-market economy. Those issues must be brought together.

Having said that, I found the British Government's approach to Kyoto very welcome, especially as they sought a large reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The result—an 8 per cent. agreement—was not good enough; much better could have been achieved. I do not blame the British Government's representatives at the conference, but I am laying some blame on the United States, which is the biggest consumer of energy and the biggest global polluter. Many of the right-wing think tanks in the USA say, "The problem is caused by the third world", but the reality is that every American consumes 10 times as much energy as every person in Bangladesh, south Asia or China. That is the reality of what is happening to this planet. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, he will tell us what steps the Government intend to take to cut CO_2 emissions.

The global economy is having disastrous effects on the environment—for example, the destruction of the rain forests and the fires in south Asia. However, we can also identify and measure global warming. I am aware that there is a scientific argument, of sorts, that there are

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

normal climatic variations and changes anyway and that we just happen to be moving into a warmer period. The truth is that the speed with which global temperatures have risen over the past 15 years is astronomical. The link with the large-scale and increasing burning of fossil fuels around the world suggests that we are doing something dramatic, dangerous and possibly irreversible to our climate. That must be reckoned with.

The many surveys carried out in the Antarctic allow us to measure the degree of pollution throughout the globe. We can date and almost time where the pollution comes from and see what we are doing to the climate. We can also look at the way in which ice caps are melting in the northern and southern hemispheres. Traditionally, the northern hemisphere ice caps have been melting while the southern hemisphere ice caps have been expanding—now they are both retreating, so there is bound to be a rise in global sea levels. That is the consequence of not doing anything.

Although Kyoto was an important step forward, other measures need to be taken. After the election last May, the Government correctly presented themselves as concerned with environmental policies. They reflected what a large number of ordinary people thought, because people recognise what is being done to their environment. Those concerned with protecting the environment live not just in rural communities; they are not only the people trying, rightly, to preserve woods, forests, hedgerows and habitat vegetations—protecting the environment is just as much a concern to people growing up in council estates in inner London or anywhere else. They want a decent environment and clean air to breathe. That is why our energy policies matter.

I am an active member—indeed the chair—of my local Agenda 21 group in Islington. The effort made by so many ordinary people is quite moving. They are desperate for a better world and a better environment to leave to future generations. That is a fairly new phenomenon in politics throughout the world, but especially in this country.

We need to make a number of important changes in policy. Currently, our primary sources of energy are coal, oil and, to a more limited extent, hydro and other forms of renewable energy. Oil prices, if not at an all-time low, are certainly somewhere near that. Even with North sea oil, which is expensive to produce, there is still a profit of about $10 a barrel between production costs and sale prices, despite the current low oil prices. Oil companies are busy stocking up huge amounts of oil, either in large storage spaces or by keeping it under the ground, having gained prospecting licences.

On the figures produced by Greenpeace—I agree with that organisation, as do many others—the maximum amount of carbon that we can burn on our planet without causing major climatic changes is 225 gigatonnes. The amount in storage or available for exploration is far greater than that. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, will he tell us the rationale behind continuing to grant exploration licences in the north Atlantic, knowing full well the environmental damage that will be done? It is unsustainable, in world terms, to start a whole new round of oil exploration when we should be looking towards sustainable energy sources rather than fossil fuel sources. We must protect the environment.

The world managed to change course on the Antarctic. I have been in the House long enough to see the issue go full circle, from the Antarctic being a place of scientific exploration, to being a place of mineral exploration, and then a place of preservation of the natural environment and prevention of any mineral exploration and exploitation—of the Antarctic shelf itself, but not of the sea around it, unfortunately. Surely we can do the same with the north Atlantic licences that the Government are considering granting. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will give us some hope that the Government will not grant those licences.

My hon. Friend may know that I have tabled a number of questions to the Foreign Office about Rockall and whether Britain actually has the right to grant licences for the sea surrounding Rockall. It is not clear who owns Rockall. Would it not be better to reach an international agreement to preserve that pristine stretch of ocean from exploration and all the damage that goes with it? It should be used as a signal, a pressure and a catalyst for moving towards a more sustainable energy policy.

Britain does not do very well in the new European renewable energy league. In 1990, 0.5 per cent. of our energy came from renewable resources. By 1995, that had risen to the fantastic amount of 0.7 per cent. I suppose people could argue that that is a huge increase, but it is meaningless because it is growth from a very low base. Every other country in Europe does considerably better, the best being Sweden with 25.4 per cent. Much lower down, even France manages 7 per cent. Germany is rather low with less than 2 per cent. The country nearest to us in the league is Belgium, with 1 per cent. There is no excuse for Britain's position, other than the attitude of previous Governments and, within that, attitudes towards Government spending, investment and tax regimes.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister recognises that enormous strides could be made. Indeed, I know that he wants to promote greater use of solar, wind-powered and wave-powered energy and much less reliance on fossil fuels and all the damage that comes with them.

We must also consider the question of energy conservation. Energy requirements are dictated by industry, by transport and heating needs and so on, but we must bear in mind the fact that an initial investment means savings in the long run. About half my constituents live in local authority or housing association accommodation. Most of them complain to me about high heating bills, poor insulation and generally poor living conditions. Indeed, many people living in private accommodation say exactly the same.

Every time we neglect to install roof insulation, cavity walls or a more efficient form of heating, we might save a little on the construction cost of a house, but, in the long run, we are piling huge costs on the people who live in that house and we are doing enormous damage to the environment. A conservation policy is beneficial to everyone even though the initial cost is considerably higher.

In this country, 8 million people suffer from some energy deficiency, in that they are unable to heat their homes or keep themselves warm. Because of the inadequate heating in so many houses, there are 30,000 more deaths in winter than in summer, a fact which appears to be related to the conditions in which people live. Clearly, the attempts made by some hon. Members

to introduce private Members' Bills relating to energy efficiency or heating conservation—we shall be debating such a Bill on Friday—are very important.

It is essential that the toughest possible energy conservation requirements are imposed for all new buildings. We must recognise that investing now in good-quality insulation and efficient heating systems means in the long run a saving not only to the individual but to the environment. Of course, if one marries that notion to the free market, there is a conflict between the needs of the environment and those of the gas and electricity companies, whose sole motive is to encourage greater consumption.

I know that several hon. Members want to contribute to the debate, so I move on to my final point, on transport. Transport is a huge but inefficient consumer of energy and is the single biggest source of pollution in most cities around the world. If one has a mind to do such things, one has only to go to the top of Canary Wharf tower to see the effect of transport pollution. There is very little industry left in London to cause pollution, but from the top of the tower one can see a pollution cloud or dome—it is like the millennium dome on a grander scale—stretching across central London. Most of that pollution is caused by transport, mainly cars carrying one person. It is preventable, but we must be prepared to invest more in public transport and reduce the energy consumed for transport.

On a more global note, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) made a good speech earlier this year about the concept of food miles and the amount of pollution caused by goods being dragged around the world. It is crazy that countries in central Africa, where there is a food deficiency and where many people do not eat terribly well, are being encouraged by international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, of which we are members, to grow early vegetables that are air-freighted to Europe. One can imagine the enormous pollution involved in flying early strawberries grown in Zambia to London, Frankfurt, New York or Paris. When one sees beautiful strawberries, mange-tout and so on in the supermarket, one thinks that they are clean, pollution-free vegetables, but what about the fuel that has been burnt to bring them here and the consequent damage to the environment?

I recall going to a supermarket last year in Worcester. There were millions of apple trees only half a mile from that supermarket, but the apples on sale there came from New Zealand—what a crazy world.

The constant global effort to increase export production and trade is seen as a form of growth, but it damages the environment. Ships pass each other carrying washing machines from one end of the world to the other and back again, but that can hardly be called a sustainable form of growth.

I know that the Government are keen to integrate environmental and transport policies, but it has to happen quickly, or we shall not be able to make the 8 per cent. reduction in greenhouse gas emissions agreed at Kyoto, and we shall certainly not meet the much higher targets proposed by the Government. Parliament needs to be assertive and to keep returning to the issue. If various sections of the Government are not fully apprised of the need for joined-up thinking on the environment, they need to be encouraged to be so. That is Parliament's job.

If, at the end of this century, we cannot turn things round and start to develop technologies that use the energy available from the sun, wind and water, but instead we carry on in the smokestack tradition, the damage to the planet's climate might be irreversible.

Some people say that those of us who look to a sustainable environment are backward-thinking and conservative. On the contrary; we are by no means anti-technology. We want the cutting edge of technology to be used to develop solar, wind and wave power and all the renewable and sustainable methods possible. We want to use that technology for better control systems and less polluting forms of energy use. Unless we get fully involved, we shall be losing jobs in the fossil fuel industries, as has happened already, but we shall not be gaining jobs in the sustainable industries, for which there is a huge global market. I am thinking, for example, of the production of solar panels.

There needs to be a change in attitude. Kyoto provided an opportunity for that, but if we do not recognise that poorer countries need help to develop sustainable energy, the enormous damage will continue. I hope that today's debate will be one of a series of regular debates, so that we can monitor what is happening, what the Government are doing and what pressure we can put on them.

9.58 am

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I greatly welcome the debate and congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on securing it. It should be seen as a plea for fewer warm words and more hard action. There has been a tremendous change, in that 10 or even five years ago, it was believed that only extremely strange people such as the hon. Members for Islington, North and for Hazel Grove supported the concept of sustainable energy, but it is now one to which Governments worldwide are committed.

I remind the House that the targets that we are discussing relate to reductions in emissions between 1990 and 2010. We are already eight years into that 20-year period, but we are still debating precisely what policies should be in place to achieve those targets. Therefore, it is not a question of our rushing the Government or of the House being impatient; rather, it is a recognition that time is passing, and passing very quickly.

I shall spend a minute or two considering what the Government have done, as opposed to what they have said, since 1 May last year. There are some bad signs, which I shall enumerate, but there are also some good ones. We need to examine not only what the Government say but what they do and the impact of that.

The Government have implemented a manifesto pledge to cut value added tax on fuel. Of course, that helps the poor, and we understand and support that. However, we need to recognise that it will increase fuel consumption and, therefore, carbon dioxide emissions.

There has been a somewhat grudging cut in VAT on energy conservation materials. The Government have done a brilliant job of persuading the public, but they have provided only a limited concession that may allow energy conservation materials to be installed in 40,000 homes, when 8 million homes have poor insulation and bad energy conservation.

I shall not say too much about the Government's policy on coal, as I am sure that others will want to speak about that. However, I have made a point before of drawing

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

attention to developments in respect of our non-fossil fuel obligations and the fact that we now have legislation in place that, remarkably and paradoxically, allows a levy to be placed on renewable energy generators as well as those using fossil fuel.

The Government promised us a Green Book that would be produced alongside the Red Book. Not only would it list all the financial implications of the Budget and the Finance Bill, but it would give us a clear signal as to their environmental and green impact. I asked parliamentary questions about that and was assured that the Green Book was on page 73 of the Red Book. It consists of one page listing 15 items and their environmental impact. Of those 15 items, three are for consultation and not for implementation and will have no environmental impact this year. Two of the items show a small increase in carbon dioxide emissions and only three of the remaining 10 show quantified reductions. Therefore, despite some bold, brave and welcome words about the direction of Government policy and the integration of all Government policies into environmental concerns, the Green Book has become a green page and only three of the 15 policies listed on it will provide any reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the past few months, I have been asking about energy consumption by the Government, as I have been trying to establish how much energy Government Departments use. I asked how much vehicle mileage was covered by Government employees, but the information was not available. I asked how much energy was being consumed by Government buildings and fixed assets in the United Kingdom. Some Departments have been very helpful and have provided figures, but others have said that the information is not available within the scope of parliamentary questions.

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): It strikes me as ironic that we meet every day in a darkened room where we have the lights on to have our debates.

Mr. Stunell: I thank the Minister for that intervention and I agree with him. As hon. Members are not allowed to read their speeches, having the lights on should not be necessary, except for Front-Bench speeches.

If Government Departments do not know how much energy they are consuming, how will they know whether they have reduced energy consumption by 8 per cent., 10 per cent. or 20 per cent.—20 per cent. of what and from when? We need to recognise that it is not just a matter of slogans and targets; it is about real plans and real progress if we are to achieve what we all want.

I could also mention the Government's hesitant approach to the European Union White Paper on renewables. I discussed the issue with the Minister in the European Standing Committee, and I understood the political logic of what he said. However, the hon. Member for Islington, North was right to draw attention to the United Kingdom's poor record in respect of renewable energy.

Belgium's percentage of renewables is 40 per cent. greater than ours. When people hear the figures for Sweden, they say that it has rivers and mountains and not very many people and that there are many reasons why Sweden might have an entirely different energy budget from ours, but Belgium is not exactly dominated by mountains.

Mr. Battle: It is appreciated that although the hon. Gentleman was not a member of the European Standing Committee, he took an interest in it, but he will recall that we debated the fact that Belgium burns all its municipal waste, which raises other environmental issues. Therefore, I remind him that the matter is not quite as simplistic as he appears to suggest.

Mr. Stunell: I welcome the Minister's intervention. He is quite right that the issue is not as simplistic as it seems for the pros or the antis. I understand that he is working in a complex political and economic environment, and I would be the last person to underestimate that.

I do not know what the Minister would say about Ireland, where the percentage of renewables is three times higher than ours. Perhaps there is a particular reason for that, but we need to examine the issue and understand why the United Kingdom is at the bottom of the pile and not at the top.

There are opportunities for the United Kingdom to raise its percentage of renewables without the conflict implied in the Minister's intervention in respect of waste incineration, for example. During the Easter break, I visited the Centre for Alternative Technology and, on behalf of the Minister, I received praise for the Government's investment in the photovoltaic installation there. There are opportunities, but we are not exploiting them.

I expect that the Minister would be a little indignant if I did not mention the good signs. There is clearly wide public acceptance of the need for action, and the Government are being offered a great deal of good will. Their warm words and investment in respect of photovoltaics or renewable energy installations at Ford, for example, are widely welcomed. There are opportunities, and the public are ready to accept them.

Returning briefly to the Government's policy on coal, I welcome the fact that they have now backtracked somewhat on their ban on the installation of gas generators and have lowered the threshold at which it applies. That is common sense, but it underlines the fact that there is much work still to be done before we can be said to have a genuine energy policy for the United Kingdom. It ought to be easy to get started, and it is good that the Government have given a fair wind to the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, the Waste Minimisation Bill, the Energy Conservation (Housing) Bill and the Energy Efficiency Bill, but they are all private Members' Bills. We need strong, positive, Government-directed action.

My plea is twofold. First, will the Government tell us what their energy policy is? It has to be integrated with the environmental policy issues that we are discussing and with fiscal and economic policy, but until that foundation is laid, publicly discussed and agreed, the conduct of the entire debate is extremely difficult. Secondly, I make a far wider plea: we need to get away from the impression that growth, wealth and prosperity can be purchased only at the expense of high energy use and low environmental conditions for the work force and the general population.

What should be done next? Liberal Democrats were disappointed that the Budget did not contain a bigger commitment to public transport. Although the figures that were announced were high, careful reading of the Red Book shows that they have to be divided by four, as they apply over four years.

We were disappointed that the changes to vehicle excise duty for next year will not be implemented this year. It is worth noting that, in the European Union, the car fleets with the smallest engine sizes are in Italy and Denmark, which seems to be connected to the fact that the taxation of vehicles in those countries is based on mileage and fuel consumption rather than on a flat-rate tax such as vehicle excise duty. By contrast, the car fleet engine size in the United Kingdom has increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s. I ask the Minister to make those points as clearly as possible—wearing both his Department of Trade and Industry and his energy hats—to his ministerial colleagues.

Growth, wealth and prosperity are often thought to conflict with an environmental policy. Countries that have high standards of living, high gross domestic product and, indeed, high energy costs are among the most prosperous, but one need only look at Germany and—perhaps through half-closed eyes at the moment—Japan to see that it would be wrong to claim a connection between a strong environmental policy and a weak economy with low prosperity.

Will the Minister say plainly and clearly what the Government's energy policy is? Do the targets for the United Kingdom that were announced before Kyoto still obtain? Are the Government committed to investment in renewable energy sources and to conservation and the promotion of energy efficiency? He should understand that a strong message is coming from both sides of the House: we want the Government to be positive, purposeful and prompt in tackling the issue.

10.11 am

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on securing this debate, and I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution to it. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on the international role he has taken in recent months to make Governments across the world accept their responsibilities to respond to climate change and to reduce emissions.

It is extremely interesting that we are having this debate this week, not only because of last night's news about an unfortunate incident in the nuclear industry or because of the consideration of the Finance Bill, in which the effect of green taxation on emissions has been a theme, but because on Friday, we shall debate a series of private Members' Bills concerned with energy efficiency, each of which could make a small contribution to our achievement of the Kyoto targets.

My message to Opposition Front Benchers is not to block the progress of those Bills. An unfortunate trend in recent weeks has been that a particular Conservative Member has tried to block every private Member's Bill, regardless of its merits. I hope that the Opposition will take cognisance of the fact that this Friday is an important day for those Bills.

In recent months, as public awareness of the implications of the Kyoto conference has increased, the nuclear industry has attempted to assume a new role and to project itself as the answer to all our CO_2 emission and climate change problems. There is no doubt that nuclear power has a role to play in a balanced energy policy; there can be no dispute about the fact that nuclear energy does not add to CO_2 emissions. However, we would be naive—and do the public a great disservice—if we accepted that nuclear energy was the answer to Kyoto, for the simple reason that the nuclear industry has tried to sweep under the carpet the fundamental problem of nuclear waste. Until there is a safe, secure and scientifically accepted solution—I do not rule one out—to the problem of safeguarding the increasing storage of nuclear waste, I do not believe that nuclear power is the way forward.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Some years ago, I had some involvement in the fight to prevent the pressurised water reactor from being built at Hinckly C. I know that many of my constituents are concerned that the Government have not yet made it clear whether there is a moratorium on new nuclear power installations. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if the Minister today made a clear statement on the Government's intentions on new nuclear installations?

Mr. Chaytor: That is one of the points that I was going to make, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on it in his response.

Last night's incident was significant. The disclosure of the secret deal with the Georgian Government to reprocess 5 kg of uranium at Dounreay will serve to reignite public awareness of the dangers of nuclear power, particularly the storage of waste and the transport of waste for reprocessing.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister believe that the time has come for the Government to call in and give their view on the British Nuclear Fuels application to establish a commercial facility at Sellafield for the production of mixed oxide fuel? The deal between Dounreay and Georgia is the tip of the iceberg of what is being proposed in the British nuclear industry—BNFL wants to establish a fully fledged commercial facility to reprocess waste from across the world. The 5 kg of uranium is a drop in the ocean in terms of the total amount of nuclear waste that could come to Britain to be reprocessed. It is critical that the Government intervene and take a special interest in the matter.

I think that I am right in saying that transport creates about 25 per cent. of our total CO_2 emissions. Public opinion has shifted considerably in the past five years, and there is now a general understanding that we cannot sustain our chronic dependency on the private motor car, and that we must greatly improve public transport and pursue a more balanced and mixed transport policy—we all look forward to the White Paper on integrated transport which will be published shortly.

It cannot be stressed often enough that the Government's responsibility is to use the tax system to engineer the shift away from the dominance of the private car and to encourage the use of public transport and more walking and cycling, as well as to encourage people to question whether their journeys are strictly necessary. The Budget contained important steps towards a green taxation policy, but those steps were tentative, and I hope that, in the coming months, the Government will pursue the agenda with greater confidence, and that the next Budget will introduce a more positive form of green taxation.

[Mr. Chaytor]

We welcome the initial changes to vehicle excise duty, the continuation of the fuel escalator and the action proposed on company cars, but other things can be done. Significantly, the motoring public now accept the annual price rise in petrol. Perhaps the Government are a little behind what the general public are prepared to accept. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will discuss that with his colleagues, and that a much stronger green taxation policy will emerge.

We must not only shift the balance of taxation away from labour and employers' costs to take account of pollution and waste, but consider what we should do with the resulting revenue. We cannot avoid the issue of hypothecation. I know that the Treasury has historically been opposed to it, but the time has now come when we can win public support for green taxation if we can show clearly that the extra revenue is being used for investment in public transport. That is another shift in attitude that will have to come about.

On Friday, several private Members' Bills concerned with minor improvements to energy efficiency are due to be considered. I especially commend the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme) Bill, with its ambitious programme for improvements to the 8 million homes in Britain in which households still experience fuel poverty. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North said, improvements will cost money in the short run, but bring enormous benefits in the long run. I welcome the fact that our Government have put enormous emphasis on long-term investment and improvements, getting away from short-term thinking, and the Bill is a perfect example of that.

The current review of the utilities regulators is crucial to energy efficiency. Since privatisation, there has been chaos in the marketplace, with many companies competing desperately to sell more and more fuel, which is obviously incompatible with our Kyoto obligations.

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. The review was published a fortnight ago and was warmly welcomed precisely because we built into it those environmental considerations.

Mr. Chaytor: I am grateful for that information, and I shall make a point of studying the review carefully.

The new code for fiscal responsibility in the Budget did not have the high profile of some of the green taxation issues. The code was a welcome development by the Chancellor and established five important criteria—transparency, stability, responsibility, fairness and efficiency—but it does not mention environmental sustainability.

We should consider in the next few months whether we should add the sixth key criterion of sustainability. We cannot continue, as an industrial society, to use up resources as we have in the past 150 years. One way in which to draw attention to that fact and to concentrate the minds of the public and the Government on it is to build into the very structure and principles of taxation the concept of environmental sustainability.

We need to consider the limits of economic growth. It has been our society's basic assumption for 100 years or more that, through the application of technology and the plundering of natural resources, we can generate economic growth that is self-sustaining and will gradually increase prosperity for everyone. In the past 10 or 20 years—in this generation—more and more people have begun to question whether that infinite expansion of economic growth and the alleged extension of prosperity for everyone can really be feasible.

There is a growing understanding of the fact that there are limits to economic growth in both social and environmental terms. That represents a major challenge, because it means that we are at a fundamental turning point in the development of our society, and a whole new set of assumptions needs to be made about how we generate prosperity and equality of opportunity. I hope that, in the next few years, Governments throughout the world will take on board the limits of economic growth.

There will soon be a major opportunity for the Government to play a leading role in pursuing the environmental agenda and ensuring that the Kyoto agreements are adhered to, when the G8 summit takes place in Birmingham in the middle of May. Our Government, and our Prime Minister, will have an important opportunity to take the lead again on the international stage.

Even though the Kyoto agreement was signed in December, the most important signatory, the United States, has yet to get the agreement passed through Congress. President Clinton and Vice-President Gore have given it their blessing, but there is still a battle to be fought in the United States Congress. The G8 summit provides the perfect opportunity to ensure that that battle is won.

10.26 am

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on securing this debate.

Kyoto was an important success. Now the problems follow: first on ratification and then on working out emission levels, trading conditions and so forth. It is important to recognise that the cuts envisaged at Kyoto are insufficient.

It is probably impossible to prevent some damaging climate change. That will happen in any case, but we must be determined to prevent it from becoming too serious. We must consider how we can deliver international agreements for substantial cuts in CO_2 emissions beyond the 8 per cent. agreed at Kyoto.

We know what the obstacle is: the United States will not agree to significant cuts, and may not even ratify Kyoto, unless developing countries are brought on board and agree to make their own reductions, or at least stabilise. Developing countries, on the other hand, say that they will not agree to fetter themselves by denying themselves development of the kind that the developed world has enjoyed as a result of its ability to burn fossil fuels.

We have to find a formula that satisfies both parties. We shall not get an agreement unless equity is built in. That brings us to the idea of contraction and convergence, which is proposed by Aubrey Meyer of the Global Commons Institute and has been adopted by the Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment, or GLOBE International, of which GLOBE UK is a part.

The idea of contraction and convergence is to bring together sustainability and equity in a programme for reducing emissions by a target year on the basis of per capita rights, which become tradeable. It is compatible with the idea that came from Kyoto, but unless we set the target year for sustainability and agree the principle of equity, nothing will happen. I must re-emphasise what the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) said about the opportunities for the United Kingdom Government to take up that agenda and to use it as their platform at the G8 conference in Birmingham. It would be a great service indeed—a new, additional service—if they did that.

We all hope that the Government intend to keep to their own target of a 20 per cent. reduction by 2010. Confirmation of that this morning would be useful, as we have heard rumours that that is not the case. To deliver such a reduction and, indeed, the sort that will have to follow after that, we need action in three areas: efficiency, renewables and cutting demand.

We know what energy efficiency measures can be taken. The question is what the mechanism is that can ensure that they are. The fundamental change must be to the way in which the energy supply companies operate. They have to be persuaded to see their function not simply in terms of selling units of energy and making their profits on the basis of how much they sell, but of selling energy services. How that can be done is the question—how can their function be changed? It comes down to regulation and the function of the regulator, and the Minister has already spoken encouragingly about that.

A recent Institute for Public Policy Research study put it like this: the question is how to ensure that firms compete on total bill, rather than unit price. That same, useful study considers how regulation could achieve such a change.

We all now understand the enormous potential in renewables, and it is terribly important that we take it seriously. The organisations looking into that issue are convinced that we can achieve significant gains. Greenpeace is arguing for fossil fuel phase-out in 30 or 40 years. Whether that is realistic, I am not competent to judge, but we can certainly have major advances.

We want to hear what the Minister has to say about the European Union White Paper on renewables. The EU argues that the share of renewables in total energy demand can be increased from 6 to 12 per cent. by 2010, which would involve significant public investment, but would generate a significant number of jobs—between 500,000 and 900,000 in that period. We are, therefore, talking about an important market opportunity as well as an environmental imperative.

As has been said, the United Kingdom is at the bottom of the league in terms of the share of energy produced from renewables. The position is improving, but not as much as it should. The Government have set a 10 per cent. target of electricity from renewables by 2010, which is good news, but it is not enough. Furthermore, we need to set longer-term targets. The EU framework provides an opportunity to do so.

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry has been described—I hope inaccurately—as not being particularly enthusiastic about EU targets. I hope that he will take this opportunity to correct any misapprehension that may exist.

Mr. Battle: If the hon. Gentleman had been able to attend the whole of the Committee in question, he would have found that the following day, *The Times* published a letter saying exactly the opposite and that I was probably too enthusiastic about renewables. The original report was inaccurate.

Mr. Dafis: It is useful to have such a statement on the Floor of the House and in *Hansard*, and I am delighted to hear it.

I am looking forward to a serious expansion of renewables, partly because I live in Wales which is an energy-rich country, where there are important opportunities for jobs in rural areas and agricultural diversification as part of the renewables programme.

I shall conclude, as other hon. Members want to speak. The Government have said that the environment is at the heart of their policy and that they are committed to sustainable development. Getting energy policy right in the wake of Kyoto is the most important element; of that there is no doubt. The IPPR publication states in its introduction:

"To most people, energy is not a central political issue".

I would go so far as to say that energy is the central political issue and that everyone has to bend their energies to ensuring that we get energy policy right.

10.33 am

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) for allowing me a few minutes of the remaining time.

I wish to compare the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) with mine. I know his constituency well as I lived in north London some years ago, and I recognise the importance of the needs of his constituents and the huge benefits that could emerge from energy efficiency investment—the better use of public transport, and integrating work and the telecommunications system more closely. Huge advances can be made, and the hon. Member for Ceredigion made some important points about Wales.

I represent Ellesmere Port and Neston which is at the other end of the spectrum. It produces some of the products that all our constituents demand as of right—petroleum, obviously, and vehicles—and there is a nuclear enrichment plant in Capenhurst just next door. I therefore look at the equation from a slightly different perspective from my hon. Friend's. I agree that the carbon dioxide targets to which he referred must be taken extremely seriously and that we must bend over backwards to achieve them. However, I think that he would agree that many of the nations in the developing world have a right to expect the use of energy. We cannot impose some colonial will and say that they will not have access to energy. That is where the arithmetic of the whole debate becomes extremely complicated.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion referred to the possibility of a 12 per cent. increase in renewables not being enough. What of a nation such as China, which has some 1.2 billion people—50 times the population of our nation—and uses per capita one twelfth of the amount of energy that we use? China has an enormous amount of brown coal, and if it achieved a quarter of our energy usage by utilising it, Kyoto would be a useless exercise several times over.

That is the crude arithmetic of the situation that the world faces. I am not saying that we should turn our backs on the problem, as we have to take it extremely seriously,

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

on the one hand, recognising the right of emergent nations to have access to the benefits that energy gives them and on the other, recognising the need to improve the climate for our children and grandchildren.

The only point on which I potentially disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North is the unilateral writing out of nuclear power from the equation. In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) pointed out that nuclear power had its place. Of course, we have continuing problems with the safe disposal of waste material. My hon. Friend the Minister is, I suppose, the principal shareholder in British Nuclear Fuels so I am perhaps patting him on the back when I say that it has a world-class business in the transport and safe storage of such material, but we should not be complacent. We should continue to invest in the science that will enable us to reduce the potential risks and the time frames to which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North referred.

This is a wide debate, and I ask hon. Members to consider the point that there is no such thing as a clean energy source. Even renewables need investment in metals, buildings and so forth, which are of themselves energy consumers. I think that all hon. Members would argue that the dash for gas may not have been the best use of a valuable resource in the long term. We all know the problems inherent in coal, nuclear power and other sources.

We must have a balanced debate, and I urge hon. Members to address the matter in such a way. We must look not only at the targets that this nation can achieve—we must stand up for that—but to the achievement of objectives beyond the minor steps taken by the United States in particular. We must do far better than that. I am not arguing in favour of one or another energy source, but we must never forget that the global equation is so enormous and the arithmetic so complicated that no particular source should be excluded from the debate.

10.40 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on securing the debate and on his speech. I was interested in a number of his remarks, such as his question to the Minister about Government policy on granting exploration licences in the north Atlantic, which is an important subject about which a number of organisations are concerned. I hope that the Minister will make the Government's attitude clear.

A number of hon. Members referred to private Members' Bills, including the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill and the Energy Efficiency Bill. Let me make it clear that Opposition Front Benchers support those Bills; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and I are sponsors of the latter. I regret, however, that the matter has been the subject of an Adjournment debate, which must be introduced by a Back Bencher. The Government would make time for such a debate if they were serious about the issue and wanted to back up the Prime Minister, who said last June that the 20 per cent. target for cutting CO_2 was not a conditional target. The issue was last debated in November, also in an Adjournment debate introduced by a Back Bencher.

Mr. Battle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: No, I am sorry. The Minister will have a chance to reply, and I have only 10 minutes in which to speak.

We have not debated how to meet the targets since November, which shows the low priority that the Government attach to the subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry, who is a shadow Department of Trade and Industry Minister, has been present throughout the debate, but the Minister is not accompanied by a Minister from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which is disappointing. That Department is closely involved with implementing the strategy, if there is one, for achieving the target for cuts in carbon dioxide emissions.

Four months after the Kyoto conference, there has been no clear statement from the Government on how they intend to meet those challenging targets. The Minister for the Environment told hon. Members that

"the delivery mechanisms will be set out in detail in our White Paper in the spring."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 258.]

Spring is more than half over, so will the Minister say when the White Paper will be published? Without waiting for its publication, will he answer the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis), who asked what the Government's target was? Is it 20 per cent., which was in the Labour manifesto and referred to by the Prime Minister, or is it the European Union target of 8 per cent? We note that the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred only to the 8 per cent. target in his Budget speech. Was he hoping that the commitment to the 20 per cent. target would be quietly forgotten?

The target is only a small part of the story. More important is the strategy for hitting it. Are the Government looking to achieve cuts in emissions from households, from the transport sector, from electricity generation or from other sources? I hope that the Minister will at least say what relative contribution is to be made by each of those sources towards achieving the cut. As the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) said, the Government made a curious start with households by cutting the tax on energy consumption, then waiting another eight months before making a much less dramatic cut in respect of energy saving.

The Government have not put the environment at the heart of their decision-making process, or even at the edge of it. The only substantial tax change in the Budget Red Book listed under environmental measures was the huge rise in petrol tax, the second in the last eight months. Increasing petrol tax is a substitute for coherent policy. Experience has shown that petrol tax rises have relatively little effect on car use. Under this Government, petrol tax is not so much an environmental policy as a reflection of their hostility to the motorist. The burden on motorists is especially heavy in rural areas, where no alternative to using a car exists. That is a further example of the Government's lack of concern for the countryside.

It is disappointing that so little has been done to explore other ways in which to encourage greater fuel efficiency in cars. A cut to £100 in vehicle excise duty for

less-polluting cars, which is still only a consultation proposal, is a start, but much more could be done to reform VED on a revenue-neutral basis to give manufacturers and motorists a real incentive to achieve greater fuel efficiency.

Why was there no Budget Green Book? *Hansard* reports at column 1062 that on 10 July, the Financial Secretary promised the House that a Green Book would be published with this year's Budget Red Book, setting out the impact of Budget changes on the environment. I have not seen a Green Book. I wrote to the Financial Secretary earlier this month to ask for a copy, but have not received a reply. I fear that the hon. Member for Hazel Grove is right: the commitment to publish a Green Book has shrunk to a single page of the Red Book. There has been virtually no indication since the Kyoto conference of the Government's strategy for tackling climate change. Energy policy is crucial within such a strategy, so the Minister has a chance to put that right today.

I wrote to the Minister for the Environment following a leak which suggested that the Government were about to guarantee coal a share of the electricity generation market. Will the Minister tell hon. Members the Government's targets for the relative share of power generation from oil, from gas, from coal, from nuclear power and from renewables? How do the Government reconcile them with the targets for cutting carbon dioxide emissions? What are their implications for consumer prices? Are reports that coal will be guaranteed a market share true? Can the Government's target for cutting carbon dioxide emissions be met if the market share for coal is to be protected in the way that has been reported? Is not there a clear dilemma? Why has coal been singled out for a guaranteed market share, when renewables, to which Labour Members have referred, have not?

How do the Government expect to raise the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources from its current level of about 1 per cent. to 10 per cent. in the next 12 years? What specific steps are they taking to achieve that goal? Does the Minister believe that allocating 5 per cent. of his budget for energy research on renewables is sufficient? What will the Government say at next month's meeting when the European White Paper on renewables is discussed?

We are now almost two thirds of the way through the British presidency of the European Union. What lead has Britain given to the European Union since 1 January on climate change issues? How is the EU's climate change strategy coming along? Is the Minister satisfied with the progress that has been made on agreeing burden sharing within the EU? Does he agree that, after four months in the chair of EU Council meetings, Britain has little or no tangible progress to show on the environmental front? As the hon. Members for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) and for Ceredigion said, the Government can offer leadership, not only within Europe but at the next G8 meeting, and carry forward the Kyoto agenda.

We should not overlook nuclear energy. Does the Minister accept that it is, at least in terms of carbon dioxide emissions, a clean fuel? Does he believe that it has a role to play in helping the Government to reach their carbon dioxide emission cuts targets? Will he redress the disgraceful and alarming secrecy surrounding the Government's decision to accept fuel from Russia for reprocessing at Dounreay by being open, at least about Government policy on nuclear energy?

Do the Government believe that energy policy should be primarily dictated by the market? If so, does the Minister believe that that will protect the environment? Are the Government willing to use the tax system to influence the market in an environmentally friendly direction and, if so, how? Have the green Ministers met to discuss energy policy since Kyoto? How often have they met and what has been the outcome of those meetings? Will the Minister publish the minutes of them? What have the Government done to promote energy efficiency on their own estate and when will the latest figures be published?

After a year in power, it is no longer acceptable for Ministers to hide behind endless reviews. The hard choices of which the Prime Minister speaks so frequently cannot be ducked for ever. The time comes to stop reviewing and start deciding. For energy policy, that time is now. Four months after Kyoto, Britain's strategy on climate change is shrouded in obscurity. Our international influence will start to wane if we do not set out how we intend to achieve those challenging targets.

When the Prime Minister addressed the earth summit last year, he did not qualify his green rhetoric by saying that any action would have to await the outcome of the comprehensive spending review. Given the difficulty of extracting any information from the Government about their follow-up to Kyoto, I conclude with one simple suggestion. Why do not the Government publish half-yearly a progress report about how they are meeting the Kyoto targets? I am confident that such a report would be welcomed on both sides of the House. Even if the Minister cannot accept the other suggestions made in the debate, surely he can at least make that one commitment.

10.50 am

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) for introducing this debate and for the terms in which he did so. It has been an excellent debate. My only frustration is that I have only about 10 minutes to reply to it, and that others wanted to take part and have not been able to.

The debate has been wide ranging. I enjoyed the phrase "joined-up thinking" that my hon. Friend used. I am usually accused of insisting on joined-up thinking between Government Departments. The thought that we should take away from this debate is that perhaps we need to move to holistic action. The debate has cut across transport, energy conservation, the Environment Agency, nuclear power, energy generation, gas, electricity and renewable sources of energy, and the technologies behind new sources of energy. That leads into science and technology, and the new industries of the future. It is to the credit of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that we have raised this matter on the Floor of the House. It is thanks to my hon. Friend today, and we need to continue the conversation.

I will not have time to reply in detail to all the points, much as I would like to. I am always tempted to adjourn to another room to continue this important conversation. It has been said that the two key issues of the new century will be the world's needs for water and for energy. My hon. Friend made the point well. We need to consider the international complexity, and to make the international connections as well as local connections.

[Mr. John Battle]

We often get hung up on lighting and heating, but most energy will be wasted this summer through the use of fans and cooling systems in Britain. That will be the key source of carbon dioxide and energy loss, although we often do not connect summer conditions with the need for energy conservation. We do not do the joined-up thinking that we need to do in analysing these matters.

I welcome the fact that our Government put environment right at the heart of policy making. I got the impression from the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) that he did not even talk to his colleague, the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). Perhaps he does not know that we had a full debate in Standing Committee on the European paper on renewables. Perhaps he does not know that we put renewables on the agenda in Europe, or that we have had debates in the House on energy policy and the role of coal and renewables. But then, the hon. Member for South Suffolk sticks to the environment and perhaps he does not talk to the shadow spokesman on energy. We have a different response from the Conservative party on energy every other day, so we are not clear where we are with the Opposition.

Our manifesto made it clear that a commitment to diverse, secure and sustainable energy sources was at the heart of our policy. We committed ourselves in our manifesto to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We set a challenging target of a 20 per cent. reduction to 1990 levels by 2000. On energy, we set the tough target of increasing renewable sources of energy—wave, wind, biomass, landfill gas, energy from waste, energy efficiency and combined heat and power schemes—by 10 per cent. by 2010. That is an ambitious target and we have already taken action to get there. The hon. Member for South Suffolk obviously has not heard of the non-fossil fuel obligation scheme that his own Government introduced. We extended it in November to double the amount of renewable energy. We shall reach 5 per cent. by 2000 as a result of that action and investment.

We inherited from the previous Administration a context in which the old nationalised, centralised system of energy generation, distribution and supply was atomised, separated out and privatised. The national grid was privatised and energy was split into generation by National Power or PowerGen, Scottish Power, Scottish Hydro-Electric and Nuclear Electric. They were all privatised. We expressed reservations about where the free market approach would lead. The system was originally divided into 12 separate regional electricity companies. We saw the opening up of competition in electricity and in gas. We have inherited an energy market system. There is the privately owned Pool for power generation. Spot markets are developing in gas and electricity. Seventy companies are now licensed to sell gas and 25 to sell electricity. In that context, how on earth do we deliver diverse, secure and sustainable sources of energy and ensure that environmental objectives are not undermined by the market system? That is precisely why we have considered regulation. We cannot have pure economic regulation; we must bring into account environmental factors.

Under the previous Administration, 74 per cent. of energy was generated from coal—not from oil as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North said, which is included in total energy use, including transport. In 1980, only 1 per cent. of energy was generated from gas. By 1996, as a result of the dash for gas, and the squeeze on and practical shut-down of the coal industry, gas had moved to 23 per cent. and coal had slipped back to 41 per cent. Renewables were still languishing at 0.7 per cent. So there was not a push in the direction of renewables. There was simply a dash for gas under the previous Government. We felt that that was irresponsible, which is why we have checked it to see what we can do to deliver a balanced energy policy. That includes promoting renewables and insisting on a larger share of generation from them.

One could argue that Britain has achieved its targets for carbon dioxide emissions. It did so because the previous Administration closed down manufacturing. When manufacturing shrinks from 52 per cent. of the economy to 22 per cent., we should not be surprised if carbon dioxide emissions are reduced. That is not the way in which to do it. We want to see a shift from fossil fuel generation to renewable energy sources. Renewable sources, combined with energy efficiency and conservation, will achieve the objectives without undermining our economic capacity.

I was asked about offshore oil and gas licences. I have to say to the hon. Member for South Suffolk that when the Labour Government came in, we insisted immediately that environmental impact assessments be imposed on the energy generation industry. The previous Government ignored that, for all their rhetoric about environmental concerns. We have made enormous strides by insisting that environmental considerations are taken into account.

I share the reservations expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) about the nuclear industry. The Government are not in the business of building power stations, because the industry has been privatised. I suggest to him that the cost of building further nuclear power stations is now prohibitive. I cannot see any private power company establishing an economic, let alone any other, case for doing so. The question of the waste still remains, as my hon. Friend eloquently spelt out.

Yes, we have clear targets as a result of Kyoto. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was indefatigable in brokering the negotiation at that conference. There were rumours that it would not get off the ground and could not possibly be a success. It is a mark of the achievement of my right hon. Friend that a conclusion was successfully reached. Under the Kyoto protocol, all developed countries now have a legally binding target to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Together, they have agreed to reduce emissions of six greenhouse gases to 5.2 per cent. below 1990 levels over the commitment period from 2008 to 2012. We will work through our share of that target and present our proposals on how to meet it.

We have already instituted work on policies to promote renewable sources of energy, in addition to our work on supplementing and carrying forward the fifth round of the NFFO. We have already reviewed sources of power and are looking at the flawed market system set up by the previous Government to determine how to deliver sustainable, secure and diverse energy generation.

We shall take forward the climate change programme with the contribution of renewables. In the next two years, the use of renewables will double from 1 to 2 per cent.

Our programme will result in an improvement to 4 or 5 per cent. in the years to come. We need to work with the Commission's White Paper on renewables; as I spelt out in Committee, we shall respond positively so as to develop a strategic approach that will enable us to meet targets to increase the use of renewable energy sources across the European Union. The fifth round of the NFFO order will ensure that we reach a target of 5 per cent. of energy derived from renewables by 2000, which will be no mean achievement.

In my work as Minister with responsibility for energy policy and science, I look at scientific programmes with a view to investing in new technologies, for example, tidal power. A grant from my Department—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

Beekeeping

11 am

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the serious issue of the threat facing the beekeeping industry. It is fair to say that the issue fits into the general pattern of crisis in the countryside, with the decline in agricultural incomes and the threat to the British rural way of life.

Until a few weeks ago, I was not fully aware of the extent of the crisis facing the beekeeping industry, but it was drawn to my attention by my constituents. I, like many of my colleagues, thought that beekeeping was primarily concerned with honey production and that, as long as there was honey on the supermarket shelves, all must be well. I am reminded of a conversation that I had with a senior colleague in which I mentioned my intention to raise the question of beekeeping; he replied that he was all in favour of beef eating. When I said that it was not beef eating but bee farming which I had in mind, he said, "Yes, BSE is a very serious issue." When I said, "No—what I have in mind is the winged sort," he said he had not realised that the problem was getting quite that serious.

The issue is serious, not only because bee farming is worth while in its own right, but because of the central role it plays in British agriculture and the ecological system. There are reflections of the BSE crisis in the problems affecting beekeeping because of the spread of the varroa mite. The varroa mite has been evident in the United Kingdom since 1992 and has spread progressively throughout the country. From looking at the experience overseas, we know the effects of the varroa mite, yet we have taken almost no action to tackle the problem. Today, I shall outline the nature of the beekeeping industry and the threat facing it and our great concern about the passivity and demonstrable inertia displayed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and its failure to act.

I shall start by describing the beekeeping industry as a whole. Beekeeping is as old as the pyramids—in fact, when the tomb of one of the pharaohs was recently opened, a jar of honey was found. It is part of the traditional way of life in Britain and has been so for many thousands of years. Today, there are believed to be 20,000 beekeepers in Britain and approximately 100,000 hives, although we cannot be certain, because there is no systematic recording and no national register.

The industry is almost entirely unsubsidised: bee farming is a cottage industry—the sort of industry where, if sheep, cattle or hill farming were involved, the farmers would be the recipients of large sums of Government money—but it is a worthwhile industry because of the combined efforts of professional beekeepers and the many small hobbyists who supplement a rural income by keeping bees and so preserving countryside traditions. This country used to produce 4,000 to 5,000 tonnes of honey, whereas 21,500 tonnes is imported, so the domestic industry is useful in terms of the balance of payments. Most British honey is of premium quality and is sold through small shops or farmers markets. The industry is one to be treasured and supported in its own right.

More important, bee farming is vital to the agricultural chain, because it is crucial to the future of top fruit and flowering and seeding crops. According to MAFF's own

[Mr. Archie Norman]

estimates, honey-bees pollinate about £7 billion-worth of crops in the United Kingdom; if the number of honey-bees decreases—in some parts of the country, the honey-bee faces extinction—that yield will decline, to the detriment of agriculture as a whole. The importance of the honey-bee is that it is by far the most efficient pollinator: it is the one species of pollinator that confines its efforts to one species of plant; it is not promiscuous, unlike the bumble-bee, which will move from, say, an apple tree to a pear tree and so cause sterility, not pollination. It has been demonstrated that, if honey-bees are present, many crops yield 40 per cent. more than would be achieved by wind pollination or other insects.

More than that, the honey-bee is vital for the ecology of the British countryside. The National Farmers Union reckons that 80 per cent. of all flowers and trees depend on the honey-bee for pollination; therefore, as the number of honey-bees declines, so too will the number of flowers and trees. That is where we see the importance of small hobbyist beekeepers—a group much derided by MAFF in the correspondence that I have seen. We need hives covering the entire country; on average, bees cover a three-mile radius around the hive, so without having many small beekeepers, some patches of the country will be sterile because of the lack of a honey-bee population. Small hobbyist beekeepers need support. They are dependent on the advice, research and support of the beekeepers federations and MAFF. If we allow this crisis to continue and lose the honey-bee population, there will be no pollination in large parts of the country, with fewer seeds, fewer flowers and, as a result, fewer birds. The garden of England will start to fade.

The threat from the varroa mite to beekeeping is potentially terminal. We estimate that the number of beekeepers has declined from 35,000 to 22,000 over the past few years. We know that in Kent—a top fruit-producing county—that number has declined from 1,000 to 400 in only five years and the number of hives has probably halved. According to MAFF estimates, honey production has fallen from 4,000 tonnes to 2,500 tonnes. The industry is now experiencing a rapid decline of crisis proportions. That decline affects many individual beekeepers, both professional and hobbyist.

I shall describe the experience of a constituent of mine in Tunbridge Wells. Peter Hutton bought 150 colonies in 1995 and planned to increase that number to between 300 and 500 colonies. Since 1995, he has lost no fewer than 165 colonies to the varroa mite and he now has only 50 colonies. The cost to him has been £26,500—a sum few farmers or entrepreneurs can afford.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I know that my hon. Friend has of late been energetic in taking up this issue with MAFF and other bodies responsible for beekeeping. Has he met with sympathetic concern about the problems which he describes, or has the response been less concerned than he would have liked?

Mr. Norman: My hon. Friend raises the central point, which is that beekeeping is a small cottage industry which, to some extent, relies for its survival in the face of crisis on Government support and co-ordinated action, but we have been faced with passivity and inertia. I shall cover that point and give specific examples later in my speech.

In the United States, where there has been far more experience of and research into the varroa mite than here, the US Department of Agriculture estimates that the cost to US agriculture in the form of lost crops as a result of the failure to halt the spread of the varroa mite is no less than $5.7 billion.

Richard Jones, director of the International Bee Research Association, says:

"Support is needed"

now

"for beekeepers fighting the mite and so possibly saving the honey-bee in the UK".

In other words, unless we take action now, the honey-bee may well become partially extinct in the United Kingdom. It is, almost literally, a question of "to bee or not to be".

Against that background, under the present and previous Administrations, the Department, instead of taking a proactive, interested and understanding approach to the problems of the British countryside and the rural way of life, has displayed a pattern of inaction, inertia and lack of interest and given rise to a catalogue of failure and bureaucratic disregard for the industry's needs.

I draw attention to just three examples of rank failure by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. First, it has failed to help to find solutions and to license pesticides to treat the mite. Secondly, it has failed to provide proper funding for research and co-ordination to find solutions to the problem. Thirdly, it has completely failed to listen to the industry.

I shall cite specific examples, starting with the failure to find and license treatment. Treatment of the varroa mite depends on rotation of alternative chemicals or pesticides to tackle the problem. This is a classic example of a situation where, with a small cottage industry, pharmaceutical companies will not devote large amounts of research money to finding a solution. To find a solution we need international co-ordination; we need to learn from what has happened abroad; and the Government must adopt a proactive and supportive attitude.

Instead, on 11 August 1997, the Government passed Statutory Instrument 1729, which redefined bees as food-producing animals. The consequence of that seemingly innocuous measure was to outlaw for use in beekeeping some of the crucial pesticides that could help to tackle the problem—notably, a pesticide called Apistan. Apistan is the most widely used chemical for dealing with the varroa mite in southern Europe, Germany and the United States. We now depend almost wholly on a single pesticide, Bayvarol. That decision was taken after hardly any consultation with the beekeeping industry. It was peremptory, arbitrary and, to all appearances, unknowing and ignorant.

It is widely acknowledged that, if we continue to depend on a single chemical, pesticide resistance will develop in the varroa mite. Dr. Cowan, an expert in the field, says:

"It is estimated that resistance"—

to Bayvarol, the one chemical on which we depend—

"will be found in the UK in two or three years. It is therefore essential that alternative aracides are registered."

To date, no action has been taken to do so.

Ironically, while we were outlawing Apistan and depending on Bayvarol, in Germany Bayvarol was outlawed as unsafe for use in food production—a classic example of complete failure to co-ordinate within the European Union on a crucial food production issue.

I believe that, for five years, a company called Vita (Europe) has been attempting to obtain a licence to use Apistan in food production. It has been dogged at every turn by simple bureaucratic delay, and we still do not have a licence to use it. A very large proportion of the honey that we import and consume in the UK is produced in Europe or the United States using Apistan, so our measure to abolish the use of Apistan in the UK can have had no conceivable impact on the safety of honey for human consumption in the UK.

Two further products, Apiguard and Apitol, have been developed and are coming on to the market. Their use would help to tackle the problem and create a rotation in the treatment of the varroa mite. Must we wait for another five years of bureaucratic delay before those products can be licensed?

The second failure is the complete failure to fund research.

Mr. Gray: Is my hon. Friend aware that it costs about £10,000 to get a medicine approved by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, so, unsurprisingly, many producers are unwilling to do so?

Mr. Norman: I thank my hon. Friend for that important point. The problem is one of cost, and the fact that we have a widely dispersed, small cottage industry. It is not an attractive market for the major companies, yet, because of the economic and ecological benefits to the country of beekeeping, we need from the Government a proactive and supportive attitude to developing solutions and a willingness to work with, not fob off, the industry.

The Government's failure to fund any research contrasts starkly with the attitude of other EU Governments. In France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Germany—as in the United States—a much more proactive approach has been adopted to research, to helping beekeepers through the problem and to ensuring that good husbandry and good practice are adopted throughout the industry.

By contrast, in this country, we have not materially increased the funds available to the industry. Last year, we applied for an EU grant, which was available to help with the beekeeping industry and, much to our evident surprise, we received that grant—in fact, we received more than we had expected to receive. That money, instead of being used to fund research and action to support beekeepers, was trousered by the Treasury and used to reduce public expenditure—a clear example of abuse of the EU subsidy system.

To support that point, I quote from one of many letters that I have received. Ministers do not see fit to reply to letters from the Bee Farmers Association of the United Kingdom themselves, so the task is passed down to an official—incidentally, in the horticulture and potatoes division of MAFF—Mr. Ron Scrutton. Evidently, he is a very important official, because he does not see fit to sign his letters himself, but has them "pp'd" by his secretary. Not only do we not have a letter from a Minister, but we have a letter from Mr. Ron Scrutton's secretary, in which he says:

"As you rightly point out, the UK is now likely to receive much more than we had anticipated via this EU scheme. Nevertheless our policy remains as before. Our programme has been based on existing work and EU receipts will be used to offset the cost of that work. I regret that it will not be possible to increase the expenditure in other areas as a result of this unexpected increase."

In other words, the money has gone to the Treasury.

We have had minimal extra support. No action has been taken. The position is redolent of what happened with BSE. We have watched this problem develop for years and we know that it will be damaging. We know that the cost to agriculture and in agriculture subsidies will be tremendous if nothing is done, yet there has been no attempt to address the problem.

The whole episode is redolent of unwillingness to understand what is going on in the rural community and failure to listen to the industry. Not only has expenditure not increased and no action been taken, but the tone of the correspondence—of which I have many examples—is that of fobbing off beekeepers and farmers and seeking any reason to ignore the problem and hope that it goes away.

That is true not only of the correspondence with the unfortunate Mr. Scrutton. The latest insult is the issue by MAFF of a consultation document—an interesting consultation document, which seems to have been hurried out very late, just in time for the debate.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Until my hon. Friend spoke today for the beekeepers, they had no big guns in their support, so MAFF did not take the issue seriously. MAFF has millions of pounds to spend every year on research, and it requires merely a gesture from the Minister—a flick of the finger—to divert research funds from other projects into research on the varroa mite. However, the Ministry does not do so because it does not regard the countryside, and the small people who take part in beekeeping, as important or as relevant to the affairs of the bigger agriculture industry with which they are obsessed.

Mr. Norman: My hon. Friend makes the vital point that the beekeepers have been ignored because it has been easy to ignore them. The amount that should be spent on research, and for which we are asking this morning, is small change compared to the enormous volume of research funds and subsidy that goes into other parts of agriculture.

The latest insult, to which I referred earlier, is the consultation document that has been produced in anticipation of applying again for EU funding. It has been rushed out, apparently in an effort to show that MAFF is consulting the industry after all, which has been given a grand total of nine working days to respond to the document. Interestingly, I note that the document is already dated May 1998, so the intention is clearly to issue it unamended regardless of the responses that are received. The document is also riddled with typographical errors—but we will not go into that now. It is a rehash of old work and old proposals and betrays MAFF's clear intention to make no changes and to take no action.

Mr. Gray: Is my hon. Friend aware that the consultation document does not cover the essential areas of pollination, honey production or the breeding of mite-resistant bees? It does not mention the restocking of collapsed colonies. The consultation paper does not begin to address the problems faced by the beekeeping industry.

Mr. Norman: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The consultation document is remarkably similar to

[Mr. Norman]

documents that were released last year. One is tempted to think that it comes from the same MAFF word processor belonging to the unfortunate Mr. Ron Scrutton.

I am sure that the Minister has been briefed for the debate on the reasons why nothing has been done. Therefore, I hope that he will not patronise us today by giving a long recital of excuses. This problem affects hon. Members on both sides of the House and it is of general interest to the rural community and to towns across Britain. Town gardens will also be adversely affected by the disappearance of the honey-bee.

We are not here today to examine the entrails of past failures to act: we are here to get some action now to save the beekeeping industry in Britain. I ask the Minister to address some specific points. First, may we please have a meeting with Ministers at which my colleagues and I, together with leaders of the beekeeping industry, can discuss the problem and find joint and satisfactory solutions? Such a meeting has hitherto been denied by the noble Lord Donoughue. He has written to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) explaining that he considers such a meeting unnecessary. That betrays an uncaring and uninterested attitude, which is, to say the least, complacent. May we please have an early meeting to discuss joint solutions to the problem?

Secondly, will the Minister assure us that EU funds this year will be used to finance incremental spending on research and the spread of good housekeeping practices in the beekeeping industry? The funds must not be trousered by the Treasury, as has occurred in the past. Thirdly, will the Minister provide an assurance that an approach to facilitate the use of pesticides will be adopted as soon as possible—one that is constructive rather than bureaucratic and which helps to find suitable solutions, paying due regard to food safety?

Fourthly, will the Minister assure us that he will support and help to finance the British Bee-Keepers Association's proposal for a national beekeeping register so that we can at least monitor the extent of the problem and understand how much the bee population is declining? We are operating in the dark at present, with no reliable data. Will the Minister assure the House that there will be a change of attitude in his Ministry? Will he give a commitment that Ministers will answer letters personally and take the issue seriously?

Mr. Soames: Will my hon. Friend add one more point to his list? We must insist that MAFF withdraws this infantile and puerile consultation document. It should be redone in a manner that befits the gravity of the situation and returned to those who need to be consulted with the imperative that they do not have only nine days in which to consider it and respond to the Department. The consultation exercise must be genuine and not the farce that is contemplated.

Mr. Norman: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. It might be necessary to submit an application to the EU to replenish our funding for the coming year. If we are late in responding to that deadline, that is the responsibility of MAFF officials. Any consultation must be conducted properly; it should not be a pretend exercise designed to make it look as though MAFF officials are taking an interest in this matter at a late date in anticipation of a debate in the House.

We have raised a very serious issue affecting not only beekeeping but British agriculture, the rural way of life and British ecology. If no action is taken, the result will be the loss of agricultural income and the loss of flora and fauna across the countryside. It will be a tragedy if we look back at this debate in five years and realise that we had a chance to take action and address a problem that has grown progressively—the onslaught of which is entirely predictable and could result in the terminal decline of beekeeping and the honey-bee—but failed to take action and, as a consequence, the British countryside has been changed for ever.

11.25 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on securing this extremely important debate. If I were the chairman of a supermarket chain, I would be concerned about what the diary columnists will make of this debate in the next two or three days—with references to shafts of light floating through the window, the bees buzzing and the chairman of Asda expatiating at length on the subject of honey. In such circumstances, diary journalists and others who might make fun of the debate would be demonstrating no understanding of the importance of beekeeping and the honey industry to the countryside and the nation as a whole.

My hon. Friend mentioned the essential nature of honey-bees and their pollinating activities. I think that I am correct in saying that 84 per cent. of all pollination in the United Kingdom is carried out by insects, of which honey-bees constitute a large proportion. Honey-bees are the only insects that stick with a particular plant or tree until they have finished pollination. They play a vital role from the point of view of British agriculture and of leisure. I am particularly keen to participate in this debate as there is a large leisure beekeeping industry in North Wiltshire and my constituents have asked me to raise some specific concerns. If the Minister listens carefully to the debate, takes note of our comments and responds in a similar tone, it is important that he should receive a jar of Wiltshire honey. I shall be happy to let him have one.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Bribery.

Mr. Gray: He must naturally declare it in the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) spoke eloquently about the importance of beekeeping to agriculture and the life of the countryside. Does my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) agree that towns are equally important? Many people who live in towns keep bees and others love gardening—most of our fellow citizens rightly take great pleasure in that activity. Without bees, it would not be possible to have beautiful gardens.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. That is also true for those who are lucky enough to have allotments in the inner cities. I serve on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee, which is currently considering the great value of allotments to people in our inner cities, many of whom keep bees.

The importance of the bee industry cannot be gainsaid. I suspect that the Minister will respond by telling us how important the bee industry is. However, it is regrettable that his officials have not gone to the same lengths to emphasise the importance of the industry in the correspondence to which my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells referred. The quiet and successful beekeeping industry is severely threatened by the varroa mite. My hon. Friend did not explain in as much detail as he might exactly what that blood-sucking mite is. I am told by my constituents who keep bees that the mites are spreading throughout the United Kingdom and that, if nothing is done to check their spread, it will signal the end of bee colonies in the United Kingdom. It is the most appalling parasite, which can be dealt with in various ways. Beekeepers throughout the United Kingdom seem to agree that it is important to deal with the varroa mite not by one means, but by applying several different means to different colonies or even to the same colony. Mechanical methods can be used—trapping the parasite in the brood comb is one perfectly good way of sorting out the varroa mite. There are the chemicals that my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells mentioned, Bayvarol being the primary one used in this country at present.

There are also home-made old fashioned recipes that work remarkably well. Talc is one, and caster sugar is another. A sprinkling of either in the hive clogs the feet of the parasite, which falls to the floor of the hive and can easily be swept away. Talc and icing sugar are the solutions most commonly used by British beekeepers.

Very sensible, one might think—a down-to-earth solution. Why not make use of a DIY solution to a difficult problem? One might well think that, and one would have been right until a sunny afternoon recently when a European Union official with not much else to do thought, "Let us redefine what honey-bees are. They are no longer insects. Let us redefine them as food-producing animals, thereby putting them in the same category as sheep, pigs, goats and so on." That is an extraordinary redefinition. EU officials are fixated on redefining everything and making everything harmonious and the same across Europe. Why they should have wasted their time redefining the status of the honey-bee, I cannot imagine, but that is their job and perhaps we should not attack them for it.

One unfortunate consequence of redefining bees as food-producing animals is that they become subject to EU statutory instrument 1729. That document may not have made the headlines in recent years, and, for all I am aware, it may not even have been discussed in the House, but it has had an extraordinary effect on the harmless, peaceful beekeeping industry in the United Kingdom.

EU statutory instrument 1729 directs that anything used to make bees better if they are ill must be approved by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate—the body set up to ensure that cows, sheep and pigs are not fed medical substances that they should not be fed. It costs at least £5,000 to £10,000 to have a substance approved by the VMD. Beekeepers are concerned that although they have used talc successfully for years in many colonies, it will now need to be approved by the VMD.

The Minister may say that that is wrong, and that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate needs to approve only medicines that may have some deleterious effect on human health if they are left in the honey. Who is to prove that talc or the other home-grown products that have historically been used by beekeepers do not have some deleterious effect on human health? Is it necessary for the beekeepers to go through some process to demonstrate that talc is harmless? Do the Government intend to go through the process to prove that it is harmless? Perhaps the drug producers would want to go through some process to prove that an alternative substance to the current monopolistic position that Bayer enjoys with Bayvarol is not harmful to human health. Perhaps we must wait until some human becomes ill as a result of the use of one of those products, before a study is undertaken by the Government.

Surely it is time that the Government said, "We know that talc, icing sugar and one or two other products"—folic acid, I think—"are harmless to health. We will demonstrate that. We will license them in the same way as we have licensed other medicines, thereby removing that worry from the mind of the beekeeper."

Another problem for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate is that the cost of licensing a medicine through it means that only one producer so far—Bayer—has got round to doing so. That medicine is Bayvarol which, as we have heard, is losing its effectiveness and, particularly in France and Belgium, it is said that bees are entirely immune to it. Even if that were not the case, it is wrong that the British Government through one of their agencies should allow Bayer to have a monopoly on the only medicine that may be sold in this country to deal with the varroa mite. Should not the VMD move forward and encourage other manufacturers to have their products licensed?

Mr. Norman: Is my hon. Friend aware that licence applications have been in existence for several years, but the VMD and other Government Departments have made it difficult for companies to obtain licences—for example, for Apistan, which I mentioned?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend is right. The VMD seems to go out of its way to make it difficult for medicines to be licensed, and have not made it clear whether home-grown products that have traditionally been used are appropriate.

The Government are aware of the paucity of solutions to the problem. The Minister of State wrote to me recently:

"The VMD is aware that there is a lack of authorised veterinary products available for use in the beekeeping industry and this has meant for many years that beekeepers have used substances which have been developed for other, often industrial, purposes which they have found, probably accidentally, to have particular curative properties."

Indeed. Why does not the VMD move forward and allow such substances to be licensed in a cost-effective way?

Mr. Norman: Is my hon. Friend aware that although there are other solutions such as talc or caster sugar, they are extremely time-consuming and labour-intensive to use, and therefore not practical for many beekeepers, who face a declining income anyway and do not have the time—because for them time is money—to devote to the laborious process of constantly administering the treatment, sweeping out the hive and so on?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend is correct to a degree, although he may be speaking more from the point of view

[Mr. Gray]

of the commercial beekeeper, for whom speed is all and who has a large number of bees to look after, whereas I am speaking more from the point of view of the private, leisure beekeeper, for whom time spent around the hives is part of the pleasure.

The private beekeeper is concerned about the cost. Bayvarol costs about £5 per application to each hive and must be applied twice a season, so that is £10 per hive. There are about 200,000 hives in the UK, so if they were all treated equally with Bayvarol, the total cost per annum would be £2 million. The total income from honey in the UK is £13 million. About one fifth of the total income from honey would therefore be spent not on buying the bees or producing the hives, but on purchasing Bayvarol from the monopolistic supplier, Bayer. The Minister should take steps to encourage other producers to enter the market and sell products that would be useful to private beekeepers in my case, and to my hon. Friend's professionals.

The Government should research what lies behind the varroa mite and what can usefully and sensibly be done to overcome it. Like my hon. Friend, I am disappointed that the Government received extra cash from the European Union and have apparently pocketed it. A research programme costs £113,000 a year—not a huge sum in Government terms. It is extraordinary that such a small research budget should not be increased, when the Government are receiving the money from the EU. That is a mean-minded and unnecessary restraint on research into an important matter.

I call on the Government, as did my hon. Friend, to correct the pocketing—the trousering, as he correctly called it—of the EU funding that should be used to support the beekeeping industry, which is under threat. The consequence of not doing so is too horrible to contemplate.

The beekeeper, and the farmers who depend on him, are under threat from three pernicious enemies—first, the varroa mite; secondly, the European Union official who seemed not to have too much else to do with his time and who has interfered in a particularly unfortunate way; and thirdly, the officials of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and of MAFF, who have chosen not to step back from an over-zealous European official. Officials, as is so often the case, and especially those at the Ministry, have chosen to go the final mile and to put in place everything to the last line that is set out in the regulations laid down by their European counterparts.

It is important that the officials concerned should correct their approach. It is important that they should consider redefining the honey-bee, and not as a food-producing animal, so that it is not subject to European directive 1729, or whatever else it may be.

British beekeepers have kept bees for generations. They have produced honey and, as far as I am aware, no one has come to any harm through eating honey produced by British bees, which are untainted by being observed by EU and MAFF officials. Beekeeping has been an entirely unregulated industry for many centuries. I am not able to point to one case of so much as an upset tummy that has come about as a result of lack of regulation.

The rash of interference in the beekeeping industry is only one example of the excessive care that the Government and officials are tending to show on behalf of consumers. It was interesting to read in the newspapers this morning that the only salesman of beef on the bone was found not guilty yesterday at the conclusion of a court case on the borders. The judge went to some lengths to say that he thought that the legislation under which the case had been brought was badly drafted and had not been thought through. As a result, he dismissed the case. Two or three other such cases are pending. I do not want to second guess what the judges will do in those cases, but they may well come to conclusions similar to those which were reached yesterday in the borders case.

We have another example of officials sitting around with not much else to do but think up yet more regulations to control what perfectly reasonable industries do, in this case the beekeeping and bee farming industries. They put regulations in place, bring people to court, fine them or send them to prison. They interfere entirely unnecessarily with people's everyday way of life.

The ban on beef on the bone is unnecessary. The ban on feeding bees with traditional medication is entirely unnecessary. I was struck by an article that I read in a newspaper last week, which stated that more people had died through catching fish bones in their throat than through Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. I hope that the Minister will urgently consider banning the use of fish on the bone, which obviously is entirely detrimental to human health.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is making a good speech on an important issue, but, as for CJD and fish bones, he must understand that there is a great deal that we do not know about CJD. In particular, there is much that we do not know about incubation periods. I think that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make a light-hearted point, and, in doing so, is dismissing a serious issue of public health. It is an issue which we take seriously and we intend to be protective.

Mr. Gray: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention. He is wrong in saying that I am making a light-hearted point. Indeed, I am making an extremely serious point. I believe that one person in 1 billion may be at risk through eating beef on the bone. By banning beef on the bone, the Government are taking an unnecessary step to safeguard the consumer. The step has been taken because the Labour party wrongly believed that the consumer was on its side and would value the protection that it offered. It is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We have taken flight from the honey-bee and we must come back to it.

Mr. Gray: You are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The honey-bee has buzzed off and I must return to the drone. I hope that my speech was not a drone. I am grateful to the Minister for his flattering remarks about the excellence of my contribution. That being so, drone is not the right expression. The expression that comes to mind is worker-bee.

There are a number of things that the Government need to do if they are to put right an appalling situation. First, they must find ways of encouraging more people to register sensible medicines. If that involves cutting the cost of making applications through the VMD, so be it.

Earlier, in a seated interjection, the Minister indicated that he thought that it cost about £10,000 to register medicines because we, the Conservatives, had introduced

the directorate when we were in government. I am happy to accept that criticism. If we were still in government and I was speaking from the Back Benches to a Conservative Minister who was responsible for introducing such charges, I would happily attack him, and just as readily as I have attacked the Minister for continuing with such charges. I am asking the Minister to find a way of reducing VMD charges so that more medicines can be registered through it.

Secondly, I ask the Minister to find a way of reassuring traditional bee farmers who use traditional methods such as talc and icing sugar that they will not be in any danger of prosecution in future. A short while ago, the Minister made the point that there has not been enough research into the consequences of CJD. That applies just as much in this instance as it does in others.

Mr. Morley: We do not know.

Mr. Gray: The Minister says from a sedentary position that we do not know. Beekeepers are saying precisely that. They do not know that talc and icing sugar are entirely safe. They would like to know from the Government that talc and icing sugar are entirely safe. They do not want words such as those used in the letter that we have received from the Government, to the effect that talc and icing sugar are entirely safe unless it can be proved otherwise. We would like the Government to undertake the necessary research and to reassure bee farmers that if they use traditional methods of dealing with the mite they will be allowed to continue to do so.

European statutory instrument 1729 goes one step too far. It is an SI to which we would do well to pay no attention whatsoever. Energetic UK civil servants with double firsts from Oxbridge should be spending their time using their excellent brains to consider ways in which they can look after traditional industries that have looked after themselves so well throughout the centuries. They should not be thinking how better to apply European directives such as SI 1729.

Beekeeping is nothing to do with Europe. Indeed, it has precious little to do with this place. For centuries, beekeeping has been an entirely self-regulated industry. Let it stay that way. Leave our beekeepers in peace.

11.46 am

Mr. James Paice (South–East Cambridgeshire): First, I inform the House that I have the privilege of being honorary vice-president of the Cambridgeshire Beekeepers Association, in which capacity I have already raised with Ministers a number of the issues that we have been discussing this morning. Secondly, the Chivers Hartley factory is in my constituency. That company is the largest producer of jam in the United Kingdom and a major blender of honey. I have a range of personal and constituency interests, which make beekeeping an important subject to me from that perspective and also from a wider perspective.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on securing a debate on the subject of beekeeping. I have not checked when the issue was last raised in the Chamber, but it is clearly it is an important subject. I congratulate my hon. Friend, too, on the way in which he dealt with it, explaining the importance of it not only to beekeepers and consumers of honey but to the wider population. My hon. Friend outlined the threats that the industry faces.

My hon. Friend rightly reminded us that the Government's general approach has been wholly inadequate. Perhaps that is no better exemplified than by asking the Minister who is responsible within the Government for bees, beekeeping and related issues. As my hon. Friend said, his correspondence has been with Lord Donoughue, who is believed to be the Minister responsible for horticulture. Most representatives of horticulture find that difficult to understand, given his apparent inability to keep appointments with them.

My correspondence, along with the parliamentary questions that I have tabled on this subject, have been answered by the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Today, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will reply to the debate. Three separate Ministers apparently have a finger in the hive in supposedly trying to deal with the problems of bees and beekeeping.

I was astonished to find that there are about 20,000 species belonging to the super family apoidea and the order hymenoptera, which are all classified as bees. About 500 of those separate species are social bees, including the one that is so familiar to the British countryside.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells rightly reminded us of the valuable role of bees in agricultural productivity. He did not mention the role of the integrated agricultural crops research establishment at Rothamsted. It has calculated that 80 per cent. of pollination in Britain is carried out by insects, and that 80 per cent. of that is carried out by the honey-bee. Its importance to all types of crop production, whether on the allotment, in the field or in the garden, is critical and cannot be overemphasised. Even in crops where wind pollination is common, such as oil seed rape, the yield improvement due to bees can be considerable and is estimated to be at least 14 per cent.

The output of bees is estimated at about £12 million worth of honey, but, in terms of the pollination value to crop production, it is about £6.9 billion at farm gate prices. That is about 10 per cent. of UK consumption. It is also estimated that some 80 per cent. of our hives are owned by amateurs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells said, the Government's references to amateurs and to hobby beekeepers in the document that was released last week show their disdain for people who produce honey and keep bees as a leisure or hobby activity or to supplement other income.

The importance of bees to society cannot be overestimated. In my former life as a practical farmer, I recall beekeepers putting hives in the fields to assist in pollination, particularly of field beans. Hives are part of the English countryside and their location in orchards, especially in Kent, is part of the English country scene. A few years ago, agriculture posed a threat to bees. The early insecticides that were used to control aphids and other insect pests were indiscriminate and caused severe damage to the bee population. Farmers had to use avoidance measures, such as using products at different times of day, to minimise the impact on bees. Just this week, the Country Landowners Association reminded farmers of the importance of following the Government's

[Mr. James Paice]

code of spray safety to protect foraging bees. It reminded farmers that a breach of the code carries a maximum fine of £2,000.

Current agrochemicals are much more specific, and the honey-bee is largely protected from that threat. As we have heard, the current threat is varroa. In 1992, the first infections in Britain were found in Devon, and the previous Government delineated statutory infected areas which have expanded to include the whole of England and parts of Scotland. However, the march of the mite continues. It is clear that such controls are inadequate. Bayvarol, which is the only licensed product, is the only one that beekeepers can use to combat varroa. That stems from the European Court of Justice case of Bruyère *v.* Belgium which extended the scope of directive 81/851 to prohibit the import of veterinary medicinal products that were not authorised in a member state.

Until that time, although Apistan could not be purchased in this country, beekeepers could buy it abroad and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate took the view that, as it was imported, it did not contravene the legislation. The European Court case ruled that that view was wrong, and it is now impossible to obtain Apistan for use in this country. That leaves just Bayvarol. That has come about without consultation with the industry and it again demonstrates the Government's arrogance in taking decisions without thought and concern for the affected industry.

Mr. Morley: It was not a Government decision.

Mr. Paice: The Minister says that it was not a Government decision, but I am sure that they introduced a statutory instrument to which my hon. Friends the Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) and for Tunbridge Wells referred. I shall return to that.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is speaking about European Union regulations, which the statutory instrument implements.

Mr. Paice: I appreciate the results of the European Court case to which I referred. As my hon. Friends have said, the regulations' impact on British beekeeping is catastrophic. Before introducing the regulation, the Government should have consulted the industry to try to minimise that impact. I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire because it is difficult to argue that a bee is not a food-producing animal. It could be argued that it is not an animal, but it definitely produces food. The important issue is not the definition itself but its impact on the industry. Until the consultation paper was published last week, the Government had made no attempt to consult beekeepers about addressing the impact of the European Court ruling.

Mr. Norman: Although it is right to say that the problem is partly a consequence of the EU ruling, as I said earlier there have been applications over the past five years to license Apistan. I am advised that every application has experienced some sort of bureaucratic delay. For example, it was said that the data were not in the right format. The fact that Apistan cannot be used in the context of food production is partly a consequence of Government action and is not due solely to the EU directive.

Mr. Paice: As one would expect my hon. Friend has carried out his research admirably, and he is right.

Mr. Morley: He is not.

Mr. Paice: The Minister will shortly have a chance to respond. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate is responsible for licensing the products that we are discussing. If my hon. Friend has been correctly informed, and I am sure he has, it seems that applications to license Apistan have constantly been sent back on the bureaucratic ground that information or data were inadequate. The Government and the VMD are under an obligation to go to the company that is seeking the licence to try to sort out the problems and get a product licence. That is not happening.

The Minister has said that the previous Government set the rules about the cost of licensing. He was right. The concept of full cost recovery was introduced by the previous Government to make sure that systems covered their costs. That is a sensible principle, but, like so many, if it is taken to an absurd extent it damages the concept and integrity of the principle.

Many small beekeepers do not have large resources. It is not a market from which pharmaceutical or chemical companies can expect huge returns, and, in the interests of bee health, the Government and the VMD should explore ways of minimising the impact of costs. We are debating a product for a small industry and not one that will be used on 20 million acres of cereals. The Minister would do well to heed that important fact. I shall be interested in his response.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire spoke about traditional remedies such as talc, which is also known as French chalk, and formic and lactic acid. Those products are not licensed because they are not patented and commercial organisations would not benefit from a licence. The VMD has said that under the pesticide regulations only non-medicinal curative substances would be banned if, when transmitted to honey, they would be harmful to human health. The VMD said:

> "The VMD is not aware of any health hazards that have arisen from the use by beekeepers over the past few years of the sort of substances various correspondents have mentioned in their letters, although there is considerable concern about something called 'Frow mixture', (apparently comprising of nitrobenzene, petrol, ligroin, methyl salicylate and safrol) about which we are seeking further information."

It is understandable that that should be causing some concern, and I agree with the Minister on that.

The important point is that the VMD has clearly stated that it is not aware of any health hazards from the other traditional remedies. It is a helpful statement and it is right that it should be recorded, but it is still far too vague. Given the structure of the beekeeping industry, which has been rightly described by my hon. Friends, I hope that the Minister will undertake to press the VMD for clear and specific guidelines about the use of traditional remedies so that beekeepers can be absolutely clear whether they can go on using them. As my hon. Friend the Member for

Tunbridge Wells rightly said, they are labour intensive, but, for many producers, they are a satisfactory alternative.

Mr. Gray: I have just thought of a point that I omitted to mention in my speech. The offending statutory instrument No. 1729, clearly outlaws anything other than approved medicines. Paragraph 6(1) says that if any person uses

"substances which are not mentioned in Annexes I, II or III of the Council Regulations he shall be guilty of an offence."

Whatever the interpretation may be, the wording of the statutory instrument is plain and it makes it an offence to use anything other than medicines.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right. That is what is said, but the interpretation is equally important. This is an ideal opportunity for the Government to make a clear statement of declaration about how they interpret that statutory instrument.

My hon. Friends have referred to the fact that only Bayvarol is licensed to be used as a chemical treatment in this country. As has been said, there is ample evidence that in northern France and Belgium, just across the channel, the varroa mite is becoming immune to Bayvarol. It is also believed in some parts of Europe that it is becoming immune to Apistan as well because the two chemicals are similar. There is no doubt that it will be only a short time before that immunity reaches this country.

Some months ago, I asked the Government what they were doing about that and the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said:

"We are not aware of any incidence of varroa mite resistance in the UK."

It is not a question of being aware now, but of foreseeing that it will undoubtedly come to this country and that we will need to do something about it.

How can we continue to import honey into this country when other countries are using a product which is not permitted here and without mutual recognition? I asked the Government some months ago what they are doing to ensure that honey being imported into this country is safe. I was told quite clearly that inspections are carried out and that

"Approximately 70 per cent. of the samples collected at random from retail outlets were imported."

In a test for flumethrin, which is the chemical involved in Apistan,

"none of the samples was positive."

Those results were for 1996. The 1997 figures were not available.

We continue to have the problem of British producers not being able to use that chemical. The Government have a responsibility to answer the fundamental question about importing food products into this country which are produced using chemicals and techniques that are banned here. It does not make sense. If it is safe for producers abroad to use those chemicals or treatments, why is not it safe in this country? The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has shuffled off the responsibility to the pharmaceutical industry saying:

"The question of any applications for authorisation of new veterinary medicines to control varroa mites is one for the pharmaceutical industry."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 717.]

That is abdicating responsibility for an important industry in this country.

There are other aspects that need to be considered. My hon. Friends both referred to research. Long-term studies being carried out at Rothamsted show considerable variation in the harm being attributed to the disease. It is believed that it may be due to the difference in the incidence of the honey-bee virus in infested colonies. There is no doubt that there is an issue that needs further investigation.

In the United States, which has been mentioned, Michigan state university has been looking at bee resistance to varroa. It has found some strains of honey-bee that are much more resistant than others. Those are examples of a desperate need for urgent further research so that perhaps one day the industry need not be reliant on chemical treatments.

My hon. Friends have also referred to the directive on the improvements for marketing and the production of honey. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food told me in July last year that he welcomed the regulation. He said that he was

"currently assessing how the United Kingdom might make the best use of the expenditure reimbursement provisions of the regulation"

Perhaps we should have taken more note of the phrase "expenditure reimbursement provisions". He went on to say that he

"will consult the industry and others about it."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. *552-53*.]

That consultation was a sham and demonstrated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells said, that the Government were seeking to get some money back for what they were already doing. It did not mean that there would be any more money to help a beleaguered industry.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will my hon. Friend confirm that under EC regulation 1221/97 the United Kingdom is set to receive more funds per hive than any other European Union member state for the improvement of the production and marketing of honey? Does my hon. Friend agree with me, with my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) and my bee farming constituent, Mr. Ged Marshall, that it is essential that those funds be ring fenced exclusively for the purpose for which they are intended and should not be confiscated by the Treasury or misused and misappropriated for other purposes by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I have no way of knowing for certain that the comparison with other countries is completely correct, but I believe it to be so. What is undoubtedly true is that not one penny of the extra money coming to the bee industry in Europe is coming to British beekeepers or the British bee industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells in his inimitable fashion referred to the fact that the Treasury has trousered it. That is not a novel event. The Treasury regularly sees the European Community as a milch cow for getting back some money.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has stated repeatedly in previous months on other agricultural issues that it has no money yet, when there is a little extra money coming from Europe, we see it rolling over to the Treasury, which takes the money back into its own hands.

[Mr. Paice]

About £1.7 million is being spent by MAFF—£1.5 million on the bee health programme and about £200,000 on research. I believe that it has applied for an extra £475,000 which, as I have said, is being used to fund existing activities with no extension of research.

I want to challenge the Minister about where we are going from here. I hope that he will answer the questions asked by my hon. Friends. I hope that he will deal with the issue regarding the future of the National Bee Unit. I wrote to the Government in December last year and received a reply in January from the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He said:

"the work of the National Bee Unit is currently under review as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review which was announced on 29 July 1997."

So the Government are not only confiscating the money that is coming from Europe, but are considering cutting what is being spent anyway. That is totally unacceptable. Will the Minister today rule out any reduction in current expenditure on the National Bee Unit, the bee health programme and indeed research? Better still, will he agree to find a little extra money—we are not talking vast sums here—to fund urgent research into alternative ways in which to control varroa, which is essential? Will he also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) has asked, withdraw the document that was hurried out last week?

Frankly, it is an embarrassment for any Government to hurry out a document that is riddled with inaccuracies and typographical errors and is clearly a result of the fact that this debate had appeared on the Order Paper. It is not acceptable for the Government to consult on an inadequate document that does not deal with the issues, and to give the industry just a few days to respond. Will the Minister today withdraw that document, redraft it, deal with all the issues and then set out on a real consultation, with the whole beekeeping industry and those who are affected by it?

The speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Tunbridge Wells and for North Wiltshire illustrated the serious disease that faces the UK bee population. It is of concern not just to beekeepers, but to everyone who is involved in agriculture and horticulture. There is an urgent need for more work—not less—so will the Minister fund more research? Will he show today that the Government actually understand the importance of this industry and undertake that they will not sit idly by, shuffling off responsibility to beekeepers and pharmaceutical industries, while the bee industry is destroyed by a mite that we know little about and which needs far more research? Will he show that, on this issue, if on nothing else to do with the countryside, the Government do actually care?

12.10 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on securing the debate and on choosing such an important and interesting subject. I also thank hon. Members who have made a serious and thoughtful contribution to the issue of beekeeping and the problem of varroa, although I reject any allegation that the Government have failed to act on the issue. Some of the partisan points that were made related more to political campaigning than to dealing with a serious issue and, in particular, public health and consumer safety issues. I was disappointed with some of the comments, which bordered on the fatuous.

There is a need, of course, for research, and I intend to outline the steps that the Government are taking. I also intend to make an announcement that may be of interest to beekeepers and to hon. Members who have spoken, and hope to deal with all the points that have been raised.

Beekeeping is not often raised on the Floor of the House. That, perhaps, is a measure of the nature of the people who are involved in the craft. They prefer to get on with the business of keeping their bees rather than come to us to air their problems. This debate has presented an unusual opportunity for all of us to deal with some of those problems.

During examination of correspondence in preparation for the debate, I found no evidence whatever of hobbyist beekeepers being derided by the Government or Ministry officials—that has certainly not happened in this Administration. There are issues such as the use of pesticides and consumer safety. The point was raised about a national register of beekeepers. Some of the comments have been about bureaucracy. Setting up a national register would itself be a bureaucratic exercise and the cost of keeping it up to date would be considerable. There is the issue of the costs and benefits of such a scheme and, indeed, whether the beekeeping sector could run it.

There is no doubt whatever that beekeepers have many difficulties with which to contend. Bees are susceptible to a range of diseases and visitations. They can become affected by agricultural pesticides and they have to face the vagaries of this country's weather, which recently has seemed to be less and less predictable.

There has been full consultation with the beekeeping sector. I was surprised at some of the comments about consultation. In the first round of consultation on the European documents, there were meetings as well as consultation with representatives from beekeeping organisations. Because of the time scale in meeting the EU requirements, it is not really possible to withdraw the documents. I was also a bit surprised because that follows on from last year's consultation; it is within the timetable that has been laid down by the European Union. More to the point, as far as I am aware, there have been no complaints or representations from beekeeper organisations that the consultation has failed.

Mr. Gray: Is the Minister aware that the Bee Farmers Association is plain that it was summoned to MAFF for the annual meeting in October last year—there is a meeting every year—and that, during the meeting, the BFA was informed that the use of Apistan had been banned on 11 August? Information of its banning had not been passed on to the BFA in any shape, size or form. It had not been consulted on its banning. MAFF did not

inform the BFA that Apistan had been banned until that annual meeting, which took place, I believe, in October or November last year in MAFF offices.

Mr. Morley: That is the process of consultation: to invite the organisation to discuss these issues. If there are concerns and representations are made by organisations, of course, they will be examined sympathetically.

Mr. Norman: I think that it is clear that the purpose of consultation is to listen to the representations from the beekeeping industry. The point that has been made to my colleagues is that those representations were made at the annual meeting in October and that they were in no way reflected in the consultation document that was subsequently put out, so, effectively, consultation has not been a listening process, but has been treated simply as a formality. The Minister may be aware that it is also fairly clear—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I know that this is a serious subject, but the hon. Gentleman cannot make another speech during an intervention.

Mr. Morley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I shall try to deal with the points on Apistan in a moment. I accept that beekeepers are concerned about three particular problems. The mite infestation, varroa, which was first discovered in 1992, is now endemic in England and Wales and there is only one authorised medical treatment to which, in time, the mites are likely to become resistant.

Secondly, the new EU-funded scheme to improve honey production and beekeeping should lead to the UK receiving much more assistance than previously expected—just under £0.5 million—but that is being used to replace existing Government funding work rather than to increase spending. That is the concern. Finally, beekeepers regularly wish to be reassured about the Government's commitment to them.

Those are serious points and they have been reflected in the speeches this morning. I shall try to respond to each of the three key issues.

Mr. Gray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: Forgive me. I have limited time and I want to try to get through those points, which may be of interest to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gray: What about the point on replacing existing funding?

Mr. Morley: I shall deal with that in my speech.

In the wake of the discovery of varroa, our predecessors reorganised the MAFF bee health service. Laboratory and field staff were brought together under the same management for the first time. Regional inspectors were employed on a year-round basis and much more emphasis was given to training and advisory work.

One thing that all beekeepers appear to agree on is that that was a good move and that the quality of service has improved. In addition to free training and advice, beekeepers have a free field inspection service for varroa and the two other notifiable diseases—European foul brood and American foul brood. They also receive a free laboratory diagnosis service.

I stress that responsibility for approving medicines such as Apistan lies with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. It was able quickly to authorise one treatment—Bayvarol—for the mite infestation. It is true that Bayvarol remains the only authorised treatment, which is a matter of some concern to beekeepers. That is especially true as legislation that was enacted last year to meet Community obligations effectively outlawed the personal importation and use of medicinal substances that are permitted in other member states. It was not a decision by this Government, which is one of the allegations that have been made.

There is nothing I can do about that, but I should clarify one thing; the matter was raised by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray). Provided that no residue that is harmful to human health is left in the honey, it is still possible to use what are termed non-medicinal curative substances. Those are substances for which no medical claims are made, but which beekeepers believe may serve a useful purpose. The example that was given was talcum powder, which may help to prevent the mites from attaching themselves to the bees.

The question was, who should decide that? Two main bodies oversee safety on additives—the VMD and the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment. Their advice is that the use of talc and other known substances is not considered to be harmful. If beekeepers want an absolutely definitive answer, there is nothing to stop them writing to the Ministry, a Minister or their Members of Parliament, asking them to put specific questions to the VMD about the substances that they are using. They will then receive specific answers. On the point about icing sugar, I am happy to give an assurance that there is no problem with using that treatment.

Mr. Paice: The Minister has just pushed the onus back on to beekeepers and asked them to put questions to the VMD on whether the substances that they are currently using are acceptable. Will the hon. Gentleman undertake to produce, through the VMD, some sort of guidance leaflet for the many thousands of small beekeepers, telling them whether the various traditional remedies are acceptable?

Mr. Morley: I have no objection to considering that suggestion. The problem is including in a leaflet everything that people may be using. That is why I said that if there were any doubt, it would be far better if people asked specific questions. However, I shall raise the hon. Gentleman's suggestion with my officials.

We are often asked why only one treatment is actually approved. The simple answer is that the VMD cannot approve anything unless and until an application has been made by a medicines manufacturer, with full supporting documentation. Although the process need not be expensive, depending on what information is already available and whether the medicine is already approved in another member state, we cannot force companies to make applications if they do not wish to do so.

It is surprising to hear Conservative advocates of free enterprise and the free market arguing for the Government to intervene and tell companies what they should or

[Mr. Morley]

should not do. We do not have that role; it is not how the system works. We have agreed exceptionally that the costs of the veterinary drug residue surveillance programme for honey will be paid for by the Ministry rather than the industry, which is the case for other sectors. It is because we recognise the nature of the beekeeping sector.

That leads me to the new European Union scheme, introduced last year principally to alleviate the burden on beekeepers of the varroa infestation. The UK allocation from what we might call the EU honeypot is much more than we originally anticipated, at just under £0.5 million. The funding must go towards work conducted by national Governments, and we have chosen—entirely within the letter and the spirit of the rules—to offset the costs of the existing considerable varroa programme, which I described earlier. We are already contributing, as a member state, to the increased budget for the cost to the bee sector. That means that our overall contribution to the bee sector and varroa monitoring has increased. It is not a matter of the Treasury trousering the money. It is a bit much for Conservative Members to criticise the Labour Government, when the previous Conservative Administration used the procedure in exactly the same way.

The issue of European funds comes up regularly, including in debates on agriculture. I must emphasise that there is no pot of free money in the EU. We cannot take money from the EU without that having an effect on, for example, rebate calculations. It is a complicated measure, but we inherited it. It was implemented by the previous Government. It means that money that we take from Europe has implications for the rebate that we receive and the overall public expenditure round. We must take that into account when calling for European funding. Despite that, the overall spending on the beekeeping sector has increased.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I have only seven minutes left.

Incidentally, the net gain to the UK is only a little over £150,000.

Of course, there are calls from beekeepers for the money saved to be used to increase expenditure on bee health work, but there are clear constraints on the public purse, which have to be taken into account. Moreover, beekeepers should also keep it in mind that Government expenditure on the bee sector is not always easy to justify, given that many other sectors want the same treatment that the bee sector has had, such as the Government paying for residue monitoring.

Although our bee health service cannot be exempt from the comprehensive spending review, that does not mean that we do not care about beekeepers or the issue generally. Bees—and, therefore, beekeepers—are important. They produce honey and they pollinate farmed crops and wild flowers and plants. However, it is fair to say that other insects pollinate, too. The impression was given that bees do everything. I do not want to underestimate the importance of bees, but they are not the only means of pollination.

The benefits are hard to quantify in economic terms, but few would argue about bees playing an important and effective role in the countryside. That is why we have continued to fund the bee health programme that I described earlier. In the UK, it costs about £1.5 million each year. The organisation delivering our bee health policies in England and Wales is relatively new, dating only from 1994. At the outset, it was planned to review its performance after a settling-in period. It was therefore right to include it in the comprehensive spending review. I shall not announce any conclusions about that today, as that would be premature.

In addition to a bee health programme involving field and laboratory staff, we have a commitment to a substantial bee health research and development programme. That programme has already significantly increased our understanding of the relationship between varroa mites, their associated viruses and bee health. A mite population growth model has been developed and chemical control methods compared.

Another MAFF-funded project, which examined diagnostic and monitoring methods for varroa mites in honey-bee colonies, is about to come to fruition. I am happy to pay tribute to the British Bee-Keeping Association, which made a significant financial contribution to that work. As a result, we have been able to produce a varroa mite model calculator to assist beekeepers to assess the level of infestation in their colonies and therefore to plan treatment more effectively. A new advisory leaflet will accompany the calculator. That deals with some of the points made earlier. The leaflet will be launched formally in a few days' time, and the calculator will follow shortly afterwards.

In addition to all that, I can announce today that we have just approved the funding of a new research project to examine potential biological control agents for the varroa mite, which might offer an effective and sustainable alternative to chemical control. Selected strains of fungi and bacteria thought to be active against varroa mites are to be evaluated for their ability to control the mites and to persist and spread within the hive environment. Their effect on harmless insects will also be considered. Such an approach could have considerable economic and environmental benefits. The work is to be carried out as a joint project between the Institute for Arable Crops Research at Rothamsted and Horticulture Research International. It is a four-year project, at a total cost of more than £400,000. It is the latest example of this Government's commitment to beekeeping and is new expenditure.

I have noted the concern expressed by hon. Members. Beekeeping is an important part of the countryside. However, it needs to be stressed that it is important to all areas—gardening, horticulture, allotments and so on. Many people are involved in the sector, although the commercial side is relatively small—but no less important for that. Many people view it as a cottage industry, with much of the honey going to family and friends. Indeed, I visit and talk to many farmers who keep hives, and it is nice to leave with a pot of locally produced honey. I have a few pots, although not so many that I would have to declare them or even hand them over to the Ministry.

I was a little disappointed by some of the comments made by Opposition Members. Beekeeping and its relation to biodiversity and the countryside is important, and many hon. Members have made representations about it. Today, I have stressed that the Government take the issue seriously. We are devoting considerable public funds to the new programme, which I hope will be warmly welcomed by the beekeeping sector.

UK Land Command

12.30 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I have no doubt that beekeeping is important to some people, but the defence of our country should matter to every hon. Member, none more so than those who represent the north of England.

The city of York has been a garrison headquarters almost continuously for 1,900 years. In the region, there is intense pride about and loyalty to the military traditions of the great north of England regiments such as the Coldstream Guards, the Duke of Wellington's, the Green Howards, the Prince of Wales's Own, the Royal Dragoon Guards and many more. We have at Catterick the biggest Army camp in western Europe, and people in York—and, I think, further afield—take immense pride in the fact that the 2nd division headquarters is based at Imphal barracks in York.

I was therefore astounded to be shown at Christmas a work plan produced by UK Land Command, the part of the Army that defends the territory of Great Britain, that detailed the precise steps to be taken to dismantle the 2nd division headquarters at York by April 2000. I was also surprised to find that no alternative to the dismemberment of the York command was under consideration.

I was especially surprised because on 3 August, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence wrote to me saying:

"Headquarters 2nd Division"—

at York—

"will expand from within its existing accommodation in Imphal Barracks into part of the vacated area on the ground floor . . . in building 107 at Imphal Barracks."

So, even in the latter part of last year, an expansion of the space available in York to the 2nd division headquarters was proposed.

The information that I received about the consideration of a rundown of the 2nd division headquarters prompted me to ask some parliamentary questions. I must pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence for the open and helpful way in which they have responded to my questions and met me to discuss what is happening. They have helped me, not least because now, through their actions, I believe, they have ensured that the closure of the York command is not the only option under consideration.

Let me say from the outset that it is right for the Government, as part of a strategic defence review, to review the Land Command structure. I do not object in principle to a merger between the 2nd division, based in York, and the Scottish district, but the point of this debate is to enable me to express a view that I hold very strongly: if the merger goes ahead, the combined headquarters for the new division should be based in York for military, financial, economic and political reasons.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I endorse all that the hon. Gentleman has said. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and I agree about the need to maintain the facility at York, but I must introduce a sour note to the debate. Why does the hon. Gentleman

[Mr. John Greenway]

think that we have reached the point where a decision is certain to be taken very soon but there has been no public debate or consultation?

Mr. Bayley: I am pleased to see the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) here to support me on this issue, but, in defence of the Government, I must say that their approach in the strategic defence review has been open. They have made it perfectly clear that, as soon as there is a firm proposal, there will be consultation. The purpose of this short debate is to ensure that the proposal that ends up on the table will be sensible for military, financial and other reasons. If the 2nd division and the Scottish district are combined, the sensible decision is for the headquarters to be in York. I shall outline the advantages of that in terms of military effectiveness.

The 2nd division is much bigger than the Scottish district. It has four times as many regular soldiers under its command. Almost 11,000 out of the 13,000 regular soldiers who would be in the combined division are based in Yorkshire and the north-east of England. If one combines the regular soldiers and the Territorial Army soldiers, the 2nd division currently has 28,500, while the Scottish district has 9,500.

Just one of the two brigades in the 2nd division—15 brigade based in York—has 11,266 troops, which is more than in the whole of Scotland. The sheer weight of Army activity in northern England shows where the headquarters ought to be situated for reasons of military effectiveness.

In the post cold war environment, the soldiers in Land Command are there primarily to form regenerative units, to back up other forces when the need arises. If they fight, they are much more likely to fight abroad than in the United Kingdom. Where are the embarkation ports? They are in England—on Tyneside and on Humberside at Hull and Immingham.

When I met my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces last month, he acknowledged that the weight of Army activity in a combined division would be in Yorkshire and the north-east, but he asked me to consider recruitment. Since then, I have found out that 39 per cent. of all recruits to the British Army come from the north of England. It is true that 12 per cent. come from Scotland, which is also an important recruiting ground, but more than three times as many come from the north of England—far more than from any other region in the UK. It is the core recruitment ground for the British Army.

I know that my hon. Friend is doing a great deal of work on this already, so I do not need to tell him about the need to improve recruitment to the Army. The Army has its KAPE programme—keeping the Army in the public eye—to aid recruitment, but we will not keep the Army in the public eye in the Army's key recruitment ground of the north of England if we close the Army headquarters in that area.

There are also good financial reasons for choosing York. I understand that the cost of establishing the combined headquarters at York would be £7.1 million less over 10 years than the cost of establishing it at Edinburgh. I am also told that the commander-in-chief of Land Command accepts that York as a base would be more cost effective, but I have not seen the official costings. Will my hon. Friend place them in the Library? I would prefer there to be a willingness to share the information; then I should not have to ask my colleagues on the Defence Committee to call for it.

I have to say that I am also under pressure from trade unions representing the staff in York to refer the matter to the National Audit Office. I understand that there is a precedent for the NAO looking into a financial decision before that decision has been made; it did so at the request of the trade unions when Catterick was involved in the competing for quality initiative.

If one compares the cost-effectiveness of the existing York headquarters and the existing Edinburgh headquarters, York comes out a great deal better according to the parliamentary answers that I have received from my hon. Friend the Minister.

The headquarters of the Scottish district cost £5.6 million a year to run, or £578 in administrative costs per soldier under its command. The 2nd division in York is larger and costs £7.6 million a year, or £268 in administrative costs per soldier under its command. The administrative costs at York are half those in Scotland. The headquarters at York is bigger because the 2nd division is bigger than the Scottish district. It would therefore cost considerably more to move a greater number of staff from York to Edinburgh—if that were the final decision—than it would to move a smaller number of staff from Edinburgh to York.

In his letter to me of 3 August, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State let me know that there is spare office accommodation at Imphal barracks in York because 250 manning and records civilian staff based in York moved to Scotland last year. There is no vacant accommodation at the Scottish district headquarters.

The economic impact on York would be substantial if the divisional headquarters were to move. It employs 170 civilian staff and 100 military personnel. York is a much smaller city than Edinburgh, so the effect on the local economy of the closure of a bigger headquarters in York—if that happens—would be greater.

The rate of unemployment is higher in York than it is in Edinburgh. In York, it is 4.24 per cent. while in Edinburgh, it is 3.90 per cent. In the six years since the Conservative defence drawdown began, York has lost 500 MOD civilian posts: 200 jobs were lost at the 41 district Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers workshop in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and 50 were lost from the King's division at Stensall, just outside my constituency. As I have mentioned, 250 civilian jobs moved in 1997 from Imphal barracks in my constituency to Kentigern house in Glasgow, when the Army manning and records service was centralised.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): My hon. Friend is making an extremely pertinent speech. Since the drawdown, my constituency has lost more than 500 jobs from Eaglescliffe naval stores. It was a serious blow to the northern region and should be taken into consideration.

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Parts of the region other than Teesside and York were affected, as more than 1,000 jobs were lost at RAF Harrogate when the Conservatives were in power.

If a further 170 jobs at the York headquarters are moved to Scotland, 670 MOD civilian jobs will have been removed from York over six or seven years, leaving just 50. When I met the Minister last month, he explained that Scottish politicians, quite understandably, face pressure to move a fairer share of public service jobs to Scotland. I understand that pressure. We feel it even more strongly in the north of England because we have an even smaller share of public service jobs than Scotland.

Since meeting my hon. Friend, I have asked my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster a parliamentary question, to which he replied on 17 March. In London, 1.2 per cent. of the resident population are civil servants. The figure for Scotland is 0.9 per cent; in Yorkshire and Humberside it is 0.6 per cent. I asked the Library to calculate similar figures for MOD civil servants. There are 1.5 MOD civil servants per 1,000 residents in London. In Scotland, there are 1.7 MOD civil servants per 1,000 residents and in Yorkshire and Humberside, there are 0.6 MOD civil servants per 1,000 residents—barely one third of the figure for Scotland. In other regions, such as the south-west of England, the figure increases to something like five per 1,000. The Government should not take jobs from Yorkshire to settle the imbalance. Instead, they should move jobs to Yorkshire and to Edinburgh.

In the past six years, 45 per cent. of MOD civil service jobs in Yorkshire have gone. There are only 3,300 left. In Scotland, although the reduction is serious, only 23 per cent. of MOD civil service jobs have been lost in the same period and 9,500 remain. I ask my hon. Friend with great conviction not to take any more MOD civil service jobs away from Yorkshire. If he does, he will give people in Yorkshire the same reason to feel bitter about Scotland as the Scots quite rightly had when the Tory Administration gathered in public service jobs and the bulk of public service investment to London and the south-east. I ask my hon. Friend not to do that to Yorkshire.

I understand the Scottish pride in Scottish regiments and the pressure to have a general based in Scotland to command the Scottish units. I do not argue against it. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister also accepts that the pride of the English in English regiments and Army traditions are just as strong in the north of England as Scottish military traditions are in Scotland. It would be demeaning and insulting to suggest that English support for and links with our regiments in the north of England are any less important than the tremendous links between the Scottish people and the Scottish regiments.

There is a solution that will preserve honour on all sides. It has already been proposed for London. Although the London district will disappear as part of the strategic defence review, London will nevertheless keep its two-star general for ceremonial reasons and reasons of status in the capital.

If there is to be a joint Scotland and north of England division for Land Command as a result of the review, I believe that military, financial, economic and political reasons overwhelmingly determine that it should be in York, but Scotland should retain a two-star general to command the two Scottish brigades and for ceremonial and status reasons in the capital of Scotland in just the way that a two-star general will remain in London.

12.47 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) for raising the issue and congratulate him, not for the first time, on being lucky enough to introduce this important subject for discussion on the Floor of the House.

I should say at the outset that while I recognise the temptation to go down the route that he took towards the end of his speech, this is not a matter of argument between Scotland and England. I am the Minister for the Armed Forces who serve the United Kingdom. United Kingdom Land Command is charged with looking at the structure and management of the armed forces throughout the United Kingdom; it is not taking decisions on the basis of Scotland and England, but according to what is best for the Army. It is not taking decisions merely in respect of the north of England and Scotland, but in respect of Wales, the south of England and London, as my hon. Friend said. I fully understand the passion that my hon. Friend brings to these matters, but it is wrong to believe that a decision will be made in isolation about Scotland and the north of England—the question must be put in its wider context.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The arguments about the integrity of United Kingdom forces and where the Land Command should best be located have been eloquently put by the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley). As the Land Command has already moved once in the past 10 years—from the Colchester garrison in the eastern area to York—does the Minister agree that it is wrong that it should face another move even further north, to a place that is even less central? Will he assure the House—I repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said—that full public consultation and debate will occur before any decision is reached?

Dr. Reid: I shall not give an assurance to condemn anything simply because it involves change. The whole point of the strategic defence review is to test what will be the optimum configuration of forces and their tasks.

I say to the hon. Members for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) with great respect that, in the past five decades, no subject in the Ministry of Defence has received more public discussion, consultation, submissions—there have been more than 600—seminars, scrutiny or debates on the Floor of the House than the strategic defence review.

I have personally answered more than 20 detailed questions on whether the headquarters should be based at York or Edinburgh, which hon. Members are entitled to read. On 5 March, I discussed the matter fully with my hon. Friend the Member for City of York, who brought representatives to meet me. Moreover, we are having an Adjournment debate on it this afternoon. If the hon. Members for Vale of York or for Ryedale had been sufficiently interested to ask to meet me, I would have discussed the matter with them, too. I do not accept that either I or the Ministry of Defence have been guilty of omission in discussing the issue publicly.

[Dr. Reid]

I have enormous respect for the traditions, loyalty and the efforts made at recruitment in the north of England—I fully recognise them, as does the United Kingdom Land Command. I shall not respond to some of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for City of York raised, as he seems to have seen some papers that I have not seen and I do not necessarily agree with all the statistics that he used—statistics are rarely objective, although we are all perfectly entitled to use them to present our point of view.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. He is extremely well informed, not least, I should like to think, because we discussed the subject in my office a month ago—we have been as open as possible in providing information. I have answered a large number of his parliamentary questions and letters—I think that the most recent was only yesterday evening—and I have told him everything that I can at this stage.

Our policy has been to be open, which I hope is to our credit. It is to my hon Friend's credit that he has diligently advanced what he believes to be in the interests of his constituents—and, he would argue, in the interests of the Army—so that I know what those interests are when the proposals are put to me on the future structure of the Army in the United Kingdom.

I say to him again—notwithstanding reports in *The Daily Telegraph* this morning—that he seems to have the advantage over me, as no such proposals have been put to me. I shall not reply to some of his detailed points, because he is asking me to defend a proposal that has not been made in advance of a decision that I have not taken. The House will not be surprised to note that I shall not fall into that trap.

Mr. Greenway: I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way and for his clarification. As Members of Parliament, we are not absolved of criticism if there are matters about which we should have known and taken action, but I believe that the fact that no proposals have been put to anyone explains why there has been no public debate in the York area. The news that Imphal barracks may close will come as a bombshell to the people of York—the proposal will be greatly resisted.

Dr. Reid: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been for the past four months, but I should have thought that anyone who has read the Yorkshire papers, the Scottish papers or, indeed, *Hansard*—as I said, I have answered 20 questions on the matter—would be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for City of York has been raising these issues.

We need to distinguish between what is being said and what is actually being proposed. At the moment, nothing has been proposed. In the strategic defence review, we are treating the restructuring of the United Kingdom Land Command in the same way as we are an immense number of other issues. We have scrutinised every aspect of our posture, configuration, weaponry, procurement process, strategic pose, relationship with NATO, the Army, the Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Marines, to ensure that they more efficiently meet the needs of the modern age.

Mr. Bayley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Reid: Yes, although, given the constraints on time, my hon. Friend is preventing me from giving a full response.

Mr. Bayley: I have two brief points. First, there is no question that Imphal barracks will close, as there is plenty else there, including 2 Signal Regiment and the 15 brigade headquarters, although the fact that the divisional headquarters may move from the barracks is serious.

Secondly, I am not trying to set a trap for my hon. Friend. I do not want him to defend a Scottish headquarters solution; I want him to acknowledge the strength of the English argument for a York base—I am sure that he will weigh it against other arguments—and to come to a decision based on the best military and financial solution.

Dr. Reid: I am glad that my hon. Friend has made it absolutely plain that there is no proposal that Imphal barracks should close—it is not only the divisional headquarters, but encompasses an area brigade headquarters. There are a large number of soldiers in the northern region, including recruits, regulars and reserves, as well as command-and-control facilities; there is no question that they should move. No one has suggested such a proposal in the papers that I have not yet seen. I do not want anyone to create in the Yorkshire area a scare that has no basis in fact.

In general terms, the work that is going on in Land Command is not primarily a cost-cutting exercise or an interregional competition. The aim is not to do things cheaper, come what may, but to do things better. At the same time, we are constantly considering ways in which to ensure efficiency. The Secretary of State has made it clear that the search is for ways in which to deliver our existing or improved military capability at reduced cost—that is what taxpayers expect.

By way of background, the House should note that there were in 1990, and had been since 1972, nine mainland districts in the Army structure, conforming to Government home defence regions. In the 1990s, those nine mainland districts were reduced to five and were then rearranged into six. That is the current arrangement, the operational efficiency of which is being considered.

Not only the numbers, but the roles of the divisions and districts have evolved since the cold war. The divisions are more and more preoccupied with support functions, running the home base for regular troops and the training and administration of the Territorial Army, and less and less involved with planning for operational contingencies, the reinforcement of our forces overseas or home defence. It is a matter not only of numbers, but of structures, efficiency and roles.

We are talking about the home base infrastructure rather than the operational structure of the Army, and the two cannot be put together willy-nilly. The regionally based commands are now largely concerned with supporting functions and the management of resources, not with the operational application of fighting power.

That is not to disparage the work that is done in those headquarters. Far from it: it is valuable and even essential work that ensures that our forces are ready when called on to carry out their tasks.

This is one of the extremely important issues that will arise from the strategic defence review. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for City of York, with his usual passion and commitment, has once again been an articulate exponent not only of his constituency interest but of the proud and loyal traditions of the north of England. I assure him that, in any decision, the matters that he raised will not go unnoticed. He has not allowed that to happen.

Planning (Vale of York)

1 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I hope to use the opportunity of this debate to prove that, although the Government pay lip service to the countryside and to preserving the green belt and green-field sites, in practice those policies are not being observed in the Vale of York.

I want to disclose some irregularities and anomalies in planning procedures that have been followed on certain decisions in the Vale of York. The most intrusive such decision, wreaking havoc on the countryside the length and breadth of the vale and causing severe and permanent environmental damage, is the consent granted by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for 50 miles of giant pylons.

This decision was unnecessary. The pylons are simply not needed. There is 100 per cent. over-capacity of generation in the north of England at peak times in winter. The transmission of energy in that form wastes power: the combined loss in generation, transmission and distribution is estimated to be 36 per cent. of primary fuel energy. It also flies in the face of current power-generating policy, which is that all electricity should be generated as close as possible to the point of demand. Supply should be located near demand.

The pylons are hugely damaging to the environment. They will blight a landscape between the North Yorkshire dales and the national park. The visual impact of 150 ft steel giants stretching from Lackenby through Picton to Shipton will be grotesque.

The planning procedures associated with the decision are fundamentally flawed. Thousands of objectors will not accept the decision without a fight, including a possible legal challenge. Many features remain unresolved: nine wayleaves in sensitive areas and three sealing end compounds with terminal towers at Nunthorpe and Newby have yet to be decided on.

The opposition to the decision is cross-party and cross-county. North Yorkshire county council and Hambleton district council have pledged their opposition. REVOLT, the campaign uniting that opposition, is co-ordinating a possible legal challenge. The crux of the opposition, and the reason, in my view, why the decision is flawed, lies in the planning procedures that were followed.

It is genuinely believed that evidence given at the public inquiry was misunderstood by the two independent technical inspectors who accompanied the planning inspector. North Yorkshire county council objected to the fact that the applications for consent to the power station at Teesside and for the overhead power lines came separately, and the inspector agreed with that objection. The consent was sought and granted for the power station, and only subsequently, through a later application, was consent given for the overhead lines.

The inspector concluded, in support of North Yorkshire county council, that both applications should have been considered as part of the same application. I refer the House to section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, which sets out the procedures for the construction of a power-generating station in accordance with a ruling by the Secretary of State.

Section 37 of the same Act refers to consents for overhead power lines, and says that, if a local authority objects, as North Yorkshire county council did in this

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

case, a public inquiry should be held, and that no electricity pylon of more than 20 kV can be installed without the Secretary of State's consent.

I believe that the Secretary of State's decision is flawed, and was reached on erroneous grounds. The people of the Vale of York would like to know today on what grounds the Secretary of State overruled the inspector's advice that the applications for consent to the power station and to the power lines should rightly have been considered together.

Arguably, the Secretary of State overstepped her powers in reaching the decision, and relied on evidence presented by the two independent technical inspectors, which they themselves had misunderstood, leading to her being inadvertently misinformed. The decision should now be subject to a judicial review, to assess whether it was reached erroneously. It seems highly unlikely that the Electricity Act 1989 was interpreted correctly in this case, or that the evidence presented at the inquiry was properly understood.

I gather that there is a very limited time in which an application for judicial review can be lodged, and the local authorities are meeting virtually as we speak to decide whether such a review should be sought.

Wider issues that the public inquiry failed to address and which would have had a bearing on the Secretary of State's decision include the question of undergrounding. I understand that BP is currently holding consultations on the laying of underground pipelines along virtually the same route. Could not the power lines have been laid alongside the pipes? The technology exists, and, on the most recent figures available, National Grid shows a profit of either £681 million, at historic costs, or, at the very least, £445 million per annum at current costs, so it could certainly afford to underground the power lines.

The Labour Government are clearly on the retreat: the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry withdrew his acceptance of an invitation to speak to a meeting at Easingwold in the Vale of York this Friday, where the Government would have had their first opportunity to take questions and explain the issue. The Labour candidate at the Vale of York in the general election pledged that, if a Labour Government were elected, the consent to build the pylons would not be granted.

The Energy Minister, in cowardly fashion, announced the decision in an answer to a written question, so that the Government would not have to respond to questions in the House, and now he refuses to attend the meeting in Easingwold. Curiouser and curiouser: the reason given was that police protection could not be provided, but the police had not been asked to provide such protection in the first place, and we are all extremely law-abiding citizens in the Vale of York, where he would have been given an extremely warm welcome.

If the pylons were the only blot on the landscape, that would be bad enough, but a catalogue of other planning issues are pending, many of which also throw up anomalous procedures on which I hope that the Minister can shed some light.

One success story emerges, which shows that people power, to which the Government respond with alacrity, gets results. Witness the application to build a cattle incinerator at Rufforth, which has now been thrown out. An alternative site is to be found. The proposed site was on green-belt land in a residential area within a mile of the city of York, yet the city council could demonstrate no special circumstances to justify planning permission.

What is worse, the council overturned the North Yorkshire structure plan and its own green-belt local plan. The local government ombudsman judged that malpractice had taken place in the council reaching its decision. Only in the face of tough opposition by local residents has the council decided to seek an alternative site. At least that is a real success story, and a tribute to people power making the Government review their activities.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I hope that the hon. Lady does not mind me making this interjection and asking a question. I felt slapped by her statement about a "cowardly response". The written question was mine, and I thought that it was a fair way to ask the Minister—I asked him time and again when the report was to be published—so I object to that description. Secondly, does she not welcome, as I do, the fact that the decision will mean that my constituents will have pylons, which were shadowing their homes, taken down, out of their gardens and off their streets? They are hideous things for my constituents to have had to suffer. Surely she must welcome the fact that they—as opposed to green fields—are being freed from those hideous pylons.

Miss McIntosh: Obviously, I am delighted for the hon. Lady's constituents that the pylons will be removed, which shows that the technology exists to put these horrible wires underground. In many respects, the issue is something of a red herring. Many of my constituents will face ruin because the price of their land and property will go down, and the compensation being offered is negligible.

I used the word "cowardly", and I am particularly concerned about the way in which the Minister presented the answer to the House. I must place it on record today that he wrote to me in mid-March, literally 10 days before the announcement, to tell me that there was no news on that front. I was extremely disappointed when an announcement was made 10 days later in answer to a written question. If there is one role that Back Benchers such as the hon. Lady and I can fulfil, it is holding the Government to account on behalf of our constituents by questioning the grounds on which such a decision was reached. I am delighted to have the opportunity to do so today.

The proposed park-and-ride scheme at Rawcliffe has been less fortunate than the incinerator scheme at Rufforth. Even though it faces overwhelming opposition from local residents, it is still being considered. The proposed site for which planning permission is recommended is green-belt land, in spite of the Government's stated aim nationally of encouraging brown-field development wherever possible. Indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister has stated that policy publicly on a number of occasions. Also, brown-field sites exist locally, but have so far not been considered by City of York council, which makes nonsense of the Government's stated national policy.

Constituents judge each planning application on its merits, as the local planning authority should do. In this instance, they feel severely let down. The council is being

investigated by the Comptroller and Auditor General, in particular because the consultation focused on those who stand to benefit from the proposed scheme, not those who will be badly and negatively affected.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): The hon. Lady says that some people will benefit from the scheme, and my constituents would do so. The centre of York is clogged with traffic, for which it was not designed, and that creates environmental hazards both for people breathing the air and for the historic buildings damaged by pollution. Does she agree that the local planning authority has to weigh the benefits to those living in the centre of York against the benefits and disbenefits to those living in the suburbs? That is the authority's responsibility. Does she recall that I wrote to her to suggest that we went jointly to meet the planning officer at the council to resolve those matters last autumn, but she chose not to do so?

Miss McIntosh: Unfortunately, the planning officer chose to leave the council before a meeting could be arranged. As my constituents' views were not being regarded by City of York council, I decided that it was best for me to proceed alone. It was regrettable that the planning officer left before a final decision had been taken.

On the point about consultation, it had been brought to my attention that an expensive consultation exercise was taking place, as I told the ombudsman, and I have evidence to prove that those most directly affected by the proposal were not even consulted, which is regrettable.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on the excellent way in which she is pursuing issues in that part of her constituency that for 10 years was a part of my constituency. Does she agree that the constituents of the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) and those in the centre of York will be served by a park-and-ride scheme wherever it is sited? The issue is not whether there should be a scheme, but that it should be sited not on green-belt land at Rawcliffe but on the huge Cliften Moor industrial and commercial estate, where there is popular support for it from her residents, my residents, and, I dare say, the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has taken the words out of my mouth. I think that we all agree about the need for a park-and-ride scheme. In the more rural parts of the City of York area, we share concern about the apparent lack of understanding of rural sites, and the need to preserve the green belt if there are alternative sites. I agree that Cliften Moor is an adequate alternative, but it appears not to have been considered, or even to have been rejected, by the council.

Mr. Bayley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss McIntosh: I am reluctant to do so, as I am running out of time and I want to allow the Minister enough time to respond.

Mr. Bayley: I simply want to offer to co-operate on a three-way basis.

Miss McIntosh: Perhaps some guidance today from the Minister on a three-party basis would be helpful.

There is great concern in the Vale of York about rumours of proposed housing developments—a new town between Thirsk and Ripon, about 8,000 houses between Green Hammerton and Whixley, and a new development of homes on the outskirts of Bedale have all been mooted. All those rumours incite great alarm in the local population, and put pressure on access to facilities such as water and sewerage, as well as increasing road traffic and congestion in what is increasingly a commuter area.

The developments would certainly damage the local quality of life if they proceeded. Can the Government clarify the matter, and put my constituents' minds at rest as to how the rumours have developed, and the exact procedures for allowing such developments?

The final issue concerns planning and education policy, again in the city of York—a shared interest with the hon. Member for City of York. The council proposes to merge Canon Lee and Queen Anne schools, creating a split-site school with one mile between sites. York local education authority has a surplus of school places, which it hopes to tackle through the merger, but the council is not forthcoming about its future long-term education policy.

The proposed merger is not uniformly popular, and is not fair to Canon Lee school, which is successful, with an above-average GCSE pass rate. Parents of children at the school are concerned about the removal of parental choice and the lowering of educational standards. Any savings from the merger would be lost, through added transport costs between the schools and the duplication of teaching aids. The split site and the journeys between the two also raise safety problems for the children in question. Parents are voting with their feet and sending their children to schools outside the local education authority.

Those examples, from pylons to the incinerator, the proposed park-and-ride scheme, the possible new town housing developments and the school merger, show that planning decisions and procedures in the Vale of York are at best muddled and confused, and at worst possibly erroneous and irregular under the law. They show a complete lack of regard—a certain contempt—for the countryside and the way of rural life as we know it in the Vale of York. From the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry down to the City of York council, those planning decisions show a Government who are out of control and unaccountable, like their party.

The Labour party said that it would protect green-belt and green-field sites, but then proposed to build pylons, new houses and park-and-ride schemes all over them. The trust that the electorate placed in the Government to look after the countryside and protect green-belt and green-field sites was misplaced. The electors have been severely let down, and the Government should apologise and reverse the planning decisions.

1.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on securing the debate on the important issue of planning procedures as they affect her constituency. I regret that the brief time available for my reply means that I shall be unable to deal with all the issues that she raised, but I shall try to address the main points of principle.

Planning procedures can be complex, and always require careful handling by the responsible authorities, be they Secretaries of State or local planning authorities.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

Indeed, I must take care not to prejudice the outcome of planning cases in which I may become involved, should they be referred to the Department, or to interfere in established procedures for considering complaints about or challenges to planning decisions. The hon. Lady must understand the essential constraints on what I can say.

The Vale of York is an area of scenic countryside which I know well, and I have enjoyed my visits to it. The Government are committed not only to improving the quality of the urban environment, but to conserving and enhancing the quality of the countryside in Yorkshire and everywhere else. We stressed that in our policy document "Planning for Communities of the Future", in which we rightly say that the way to save our countryside is to make our towns and cities more attractive places in which to live and work. It is not a question of country versus town, but of making sensible and balanced decisions that recognise the importance and the value of both.

We are also committed to local and democratic decision making. With a few notable exceptions, planning decisions in local areas are best made locally. We do not intend to interfere in that unless it is necessary to do so. I hope that the hon. Lady, whose constituency includes the historic site of the battle of Marston moor, will not encourage an over-mighty Government to interfere too much in the rights of local communities, or the same spirit that many years ago led representatives of this House to fight for their rights might raise its head again.

I am aware that the hon. Lady's constituency incorporates parts of several local planning authority areas, and that the detailed practices of the authorities may vary from place to place. Let me describe broadly the operation of the planning system in the Vale of York.

Procedurally, the local planning authorities must follow statutory Acts, regulations and directions, but the first and essential point is that planning decisions in the Vale of York must take account of national policy and advice. Our advice is set out in planning policy guidance notes and departmental circulars.

At the regional level, in March 1996 the previous Government published regional planning guidance for what was then the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Work to revise it is under way in the region. The hon. Lady will be aware of our recently stated intention to enhance regional planning guidance with much more extensive regional involvement in preparation.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I shall, but the hon. Lady will be aware that time is limited.

Miss McIntosh: Can the Minister assure hon. Members that green-belt sites should not be built on?

Mr. Raynsford: I can assure the hon. Lady that planning policy guidance in PPG II has always made it clear that there is a presumption against development in the green belt, and that presumption remains absolutely the same. The principle that development should take place in the green belt only in exceptional circumstances has been part of planning policy for some years.

I remind the hon. Lady that, when in power, the Conservative party varied that policy, and allowed developments in the green belt on a number of occasions when it was thought that there were overriding reasons for doing so. It would be wrong to take a party view on the matter. The presumption is that there should not be development in the green belt, except in special and overriding circumstances.

We are committed to a plan-led system for making decisions about planning applications. The guideline is that a planning decision must accord with the development plan, unless material considerations suggest otherwise. The development plan is therefore paramount. Local planning authorities must recognise that in making decisions about planning applications.

In the Vale of York, the development plan that sets out strategic policy is the North Yorkshire county structure plan. It was adopted in 1980, and has been altered three times since then. I understand that discussions are now under way about a further review of the plan, so that it can be brought up to date jointly by the four authorities involved: North Yorkshire county council, City of York council, and the two national park authorities with structure planning responsibilities in North Yorkshire.

Structure plans are rarely concerned with specific sites, which are identified in local plans. The coverage of local plans in the Vale of York is incomplete, but detailed districtwide local plans are being prepared. In the Hambleton district, objections have been considered at a public inquiry. The inspector reported in July last year, and I have been informed that the district council is about to publish proposed modifications.

In Harrogate district, a public local inquiry is looking into objections to the draft local plan. In York, I understand that the city council is soon to issue a draft local plan that will cover the revised city area for the first time. It will be placed on deposit, which will allow anyone to object to its proposals.

There is national advice and statutory direction about what constitutes a departure from local plans, but it is essentially for local planning authorities to decide whether particular planning applications justify departure. The Secretary of State has powers to intervene in any planning application without its being referred to him, but they are rarely used. Most decisions are best taken locally, by the responsible authorities.

That procedural detail leads me back to the statutory Acts and regulations to which planning decision makers must adhere in the Vale of York. I am sure that the hon. Lady does not want me to go into every detail of the matters that we are discussing today, but I should say that members of local planning authorities are elected to represent the interests of the whole community in planning matters.

Local opposition to or support for a proposal is not in itself a ground for refusing or for granting permission, unless there are valid substantiated planning reasons for doing so. When determining planning applications, authorities must take account of relevant views on planning matters, including those expressed by local residents and third parties.

The hon. Lady mentioned the northern gateway park-and-ride scheme. I am aware of the City of York's proposal, and we have received a great deal of correspondence about it. I understand that it is usually

referred to as the York northern gateway proposal, a description which applies to a successful bid to the previous Administration by City of York council for support under the capital challenge programme.

I should stress that the availability of Government funding for the scheme has always been conditional on planning consent being granted. Therefore, there is no question of that influencing whether consent will be given. If there are concerns, they must be considered locally. The matter is for the council to decide, following citywide consultation. If local residents are still concerned, they may consider a challenge in the courts or assessment by the local government ombudsman. I have recently replied to correspondence from the hon. Lady on that matter.

I know about the proposals for a temporary animal cremator at Rufforth, and I understand that the City of York council resolved to grant permission in 1997. However, the local government ombudsman has decided that there was maladministration, because the council did not refer the planning application to the Secretary of State.

The council reconsidered the issue last week, and decided to refuse planning consent for a revised application and rescinded the previous resolution. The applicants may consider an appeal to the Secretary of State, so I cannot comment on the matter. I hope that the hon. Lady will acknowledge that the local authority appears to have responded positively to the views of the ombudsman.

The proposed new settlement in the Thirsk and Ripon area is merely one of a number of development scenarios suggested by consultants, not by the Government, and certainly not by the Labour party. The consultants are helping the planning conference of local authorities in what is now Yorkshire and the Humber region on the review of regional planning guidance for the region.

The proposal has no official backing from the local authority planning conference or from my Department. It is simply an issue which will be considered by the conference of local authorities in developing regional guidance. It is proper that they should review options and decide, in the light of their experience of the region the most appropriate solution.

The hon. Lady gave a great deal of time in her speech to the North Yorkshire power line. Unfortunately, that is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and it would not be appropriate for me to make detailed comments on it, other than to say that my right hon. Friend looked carefully at the conclusions of the two major public inquiries—six and a half years of consideration—which led to the decision.

The decision was based on the views of independent inspectors who had considered the matter carefully. The full reasons for my right hon. Friend's decision are contained in the decision letter sent by her to the company, and it would not be right for me to comment further on the issue.

The hon. Lady has made allegations about my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry. I regret that she chose to make them in a debate in which he was not present and was not able to answer. I regret the use—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We now move on to the next debate.

National House-Building Council (Warranty)

1.30 pm

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North–East): Before I came into this place, I was the chair of the Local Government Association planning committee, and I worked for Abbey National designing its mortgage system. Since I have been elected, a couple of new estates have been built in my constituency, so Milton Keynes has a large number of new homes. We are having this debate in the context of the Government's policy that 60 per cent. of new development should be on brown-field sites, as was mentioned in the previous debate. That policy raises issues about the quality of that development, contaminated land, affordability and a number of other issues.

I congratulate the Government on the initiatives that they have already taken, the reviews that they have done, the updating of the planning legislation, the recent announcement on design for the disabled, and a number of other initiatives taken by colleagues, such as private Members' Bills on energy efficiency. In this debate, I shall try to be reasonable, but I suspect that some of the victims of defects in house building would be less than charitable.

Last week, a television programme called "On the House" looked at an estate in my constituency, where a few houses had serious defects and others had major problems, but most had problems of the niggly variety. The programme damned the whole estate because there is not an adequate system for remedying problems.

The National Association of New Home Owners estimates that about 1,000 to 1,500 new homes have serious defects, by which it means roof supports that do not support roofs and that kind of thing.

Mr. Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way at this juncture. I congratulate him on securing this debate at a timely moment in the Government's period of office. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his recent consultation document "Combating Cowboy Builders". A recent Granada Television programme called "Builders from Hell" highlighted some of the serious problems created by rogue builders in various parts of the country.

If hon. Members had viewed that programme, they would have seen 20 minutes dedicated to the Kiely brothers, who have built sub-standard properties in my constituency and around greater Manchester. They are mainly new-built homes with plumbing deficiencies, insulation deficiencies and major structural defects. The builders have left streets unfinished, and failed to provide street lighting or even proper drainage.

One estate in particular—Victoria mews in Bury—has cost the National House-Building Council £750,000 in insurance claims to correct the mistakes. No national insurer will now insure that company. It encouraged clients to use its own firm of solicitors for conveyancing. It provides marketing services—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is far too long. The hon. Gentleman, with the agreement of his hon. Friend, may make a short speech later. That may be the best way to proceed.

Mr. White: My hon. Friend has dealt with cowboy builders, and I agree entirely with him. Defects can occur with any builder. A large reason for that is the system of subcontracting. The National House-Building Council vets builders, but there is no way in which it can vet subcontractors. The system of competitive tendering, the penalties system and the low skills of the work force that many subcontractors use mean that we have a real problem of poor workmanship.

In my constituency, a reputable builder used a subcontractor from the Confederation of Registered Gas Installers to install gas pipes in houses eight or nine years ago. This year, a number of those gas pipes were found not to have been lagged. Home owners in that street are now worried that they will have major problems with their gas supply, and gas leaks.

There is a real problem with inspections. There is no agreement about how many inspections are needed. Local authorities argue that there about seven points at which new homes ought to be inspected. The NHBC argues that there are four, and does only two. A "Dispatches" programme last November highlighted what happened when half an estate was inspected by local authority inspectors and the other half by NHBC inspectors. In the first half there were few problems, and in the other there were substantial problems in many of the houses. The same programme identified a national survey that showed that many houses had blatant defects.

One builder in my constituency told the home owner that he had forgotten to put the foundations into the porch, and that it would have to be rebuilt. A former NHBC inspector told the "Dispatches" programme that he was constantly told not to upset the builders.

The NHBC gives quality awards to various builders. Despite its denials, I have a letter from a major builder saying that the NHBC tells the builders when the inspection will take place, and how to get round it. Another major concern is the time taken to inspect a house—in general, it is only a few minutes. It is easy to skimp on inspections, because profits are high and penalties almost non-existent for not doing them properly.

My major concern in this debate is the conflict of interests between the inspection and the NHBC warranty. A little while ago, the previous Government forced local authorities to separate their client and contractor roles. With hindsight, I think that that was a good decision. The same applies to the NHBC. There should be a distinct split between the inspection role and the provision of warranties. One company should not do both.

Very few people understand warranties. If one gets one at all, it arrives weeks after moving in to the new home. It is not a guarantee, although most people believe it is. It starts on the day of the final inspection, not when one moves in to the house. Many people do not realise that. If the house has been empty for six or nine months, people have lost that amount of the warranty in the crucial first two years.

Zurich Municipal does have a buy-back scheme for local authorities, but the NHBC does not. That is a source of contention. Many people confuse the warranty system with the mortgage provider's building insurance. If people get a problem, the first response is a denial. The second is to shift the responsibility either from the NHBC to the builder or vice versa. The whole system seems to be delay, delay, delay, especially after that crucial two-year period. The timing of the claim can affect how much compensation people get.

One thing that really worries me about the NHBC is that everyone trusts the Consumers Association, which stands up for consumers' rights in everything except house purchases, which is the single biggest purchase that most people make. I do not accuse the Consumers Association of being corrupt, but if it investigated its role with regard to the NHBC, it would be less than complimentary if the investigation was about anyone other than itself. The Consumers Association should ask itself some serious questions about its role.

I have no faith in the NHBC's proposed consumer council. We ought to have such a council, but it ought to be independent, and have some teeth. Housing logbooks have been talked about for a long time. My hon. Friend the Minister has spoken about them in the past. It is long past the time when we should introduce them. They should be one of the top priorities for the Government.

If most new building is to be on brown-field sites, the warranty system must be extended to refurbishments, alterations, improvements and renovation, for example, of blocks of flats. In addition, the problem of the speed with which most problems are resolved and claims dealt with needs to be addressed, and an independent disputes resolution procedure—perhaps an ombudsman—introduced.

The Government must tackle the monopolistic aspects of the warranty system and the NHBC's role. It makes an operating profit of £10 million, and has reserves of £600 million. It pays out, on average, £15 million a year—although, if my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) is correct, this year's figure may be slightly higher—which means that only a small proportion of its reserves are used to pay out.

On the issue of building control, local authority fees are set by the Government, although the local authority associations came within a whisker of persuading the previous Government to devolve fee setting to local authorities. I hope that I can persuade the Minister to go one step further than the previous Government, and permit that devolution.

Independent structural surveys are crucial to proper inspection. There should be a full survey by an independent structural engineer immediately before warranty—I am sure that the issue of who pays for that can be resolved. If the housing logbook was be made valid by starting with that structural survey, it would build confidence among new home owners.

Before mortgage, purchasers should be required to get an independent structural survey, which would offer them the protection of knowing what they were buying. It would be possible to introduce into that process matters such as the energy rating and other environmental audit aspects of the house. Either the seller or, in the case of a new house, the builder could be made responsible for the first survey, which would help to increase confidence in the system.

There should be an audit mechanism for the inspection process. My preferred solution would be to return the inspection process to the sole control of local authorities, although I am not sure that I can persuade my hon. Friend the Minister to go that far today.

A 1996 Justice report made several recommendations. I urge the my hon. Friend to implement the updating of the Defective Premises Act 1972, so that it is possible to ensure that work is done with good workmanship, using proper materials, and that a dwelling is fit for habitation; and to extend the period in which builders can be sued from six years to, say, 12 or 15 years. In addition, section 38 of the Building Act 1984, which would allow a breach of building regulations to be actionable, has never been implemented, and I urge my hon. Friend to consider implementing such a measure.

So as to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton to contribute, I shall end my speech. The problem is complex, as the Minister is aware, but there is an urgent need for comprehensive reform. Given that it is the Government's policy to build on brown-field sites, which is a welcome development, the problem needs to be addressed quickly so that house purchasers—especially new house purchasers—can have a degree of confidence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I take it that the Minister has no objection to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) addressing the House?

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford) *indicated assent.*

1.42 pm

Mr. Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your earlier advice. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. White) for allowing me a couple of minutes in which to speak. I agree with much of what he has said.

The company I mentioned earlier encouraged clients to use for conveyancing a firm of solicitors which are the company's own solicitors; it also provides mortgages from firms linked to the company. How can that be allowed in 1998? It is obvious that tighter legislation to protect home buyers is urgently required. Raising the profile of this serious problem is one of the reasons that I submitted early-day motion 1146. I received a letter from the chief executive of the NHBC supporting that early-day motion.

As part of the consultation process, I shall offer the Minister some proposals put together by my local trading standards department in the borough of Rochdale. In addition, there was a meeting yesterday of Manchester building control officers, who are considering the problem. I am confident that the Government will tackle this serious issue, and I await legislation to protect home buyers and to rid the country of rogue builders.

1.44 pm

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) on his success in securing the debate, and on choosing a subject of real concern—the standard of new houses and the importance of ensuring that there is real redress when members of the public have acquired a house that proves to be defective.

I share my hon. Friend's concern that there are far too many defects in new houses, and that, when such defects arise, the response is not always as effective as it should be. We should be encouraging in the house-building industry and in the construction industry generally a culture that seeks to ensure zero defects on handover, and guarantees effective remedies when defects are found. If it is properly structured and managed, a new home warranty system can be a powerful force for pushing up standards of construction and after-sales service, and giving the public reassurance that they will be covered.

In my response to the points raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes, North-East and for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin), I shall concentrate on three issues: first, the role of the National House-Building Council in respect of new homes and warranties; secondly, the operation of the building control function; and, thirdly, cowboy builders, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton referred. The NHBC's role in the building of new homes falls into two main areas: first, the provision of building control services by its subsidiary company NHBC Building Control Services Ltd.; secondly, the provision of a new homes warranty under its non-statutory Buildmark warranty scheme.

Before I address the concerns raised about the NHBC's Buildmark warranty scheme, it is important to outline the cover it provides. The scheme provides a 10-year warranty consisting of two parts. The first part covers any defects that arise during the first two years as a result of the builder not keeping to any of the NHBC's standards for materials and workmanship. The second entitles the owner to claim against damage caused by defined structural defects within years three to 10.

When a defect covered by the scheme is discovered within the first two years of the warranty and the builder fails to carry out remedial work, the NHBC provides a free conciliation service. Should that prove unsatisfactory, or if a dispute arises between the owner and the builder or the owner and the NHBC at any time in the 10-year period of the warranty, the scheme also provides an arbitration service. That is an independent procedure, with the arbitrator appointed by the chairman or a vice-president of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

From correspondence received by my Department, recent television and radio programmes, issues raised by my hon. Friends in the debate and my own personal experience over many years, I know that there are real concerns about the effectiveness of the NHBC warranty scheme. Many representations have been made by bodies such as the National Association of New Homeowners about the failure of the scheme in certain cases to provide adequate safeguards for home owners whose homes have proved unsatisfactory.

I share those concerns, and I am determined that positive action should be taken to address them. That is why I have on three separate occasions in the past year met the chief executive and senior officials of the NHBC, and why I am closely monitoring the NHBC's review of its warranty service. I have not ruled out Government action to improve consumer protection in this area, but I should prefer action to be taken voluntarily.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

At my most recent meeting with the NHBC's chief executive, on 24 March, I acknowledged that the NHBC has done a great deal of useful work since its review was launched last year. I am encouraged by the progress that the NHBC has made in several areas, and I hope that its efforts bear fruit. However, I believe that the NHBC can make further progress on several other matters; I am especially interested in what proposals it has for improving the conciliation and arbitration arrangements, and for putting into the public domain information on the performance of builders in terms of reliability and after-sales service.

There is a question whether the NHBC should more clearly separate its various roles. I believe that it accepts that there is a need for its roles as standard setter, as independent regulator and as insurance provider to be more clearly defined and demarcated. For example, it accepts that owners need to be assured that the person dealing with a claim under the warranty or carrying out a conciliation between the owner and the builder is from a different part of the NHBC's operations than that which undertook initial inspection of the property for warranty purposes, or for the purposes of building control.

To address that issue, the NHBC has informed me that, from 1 July, all its claims staff will report to the director of claims at NHBC head office. That will ensure management lines which are clearly separate from the inspection function. In addition, the NHBC is undertaking a major overhaul of its conciliation service, so that it, too, will be distanced from the claims-handling function. I await more details, but I hope that those management reforms will help to make the NHBC services more transparent, more impartial and more responsive to consumer concerns.

I hope that reforms to the conciliation service will also include greater powers for the NHBC to step in directly and put matters right. The NHBC has said that its revised conciliation service will be backed by a new finishing standard and after-sales protocol for house builders.

Ms Tess Kingham (Gloucester): A constituent in Gloucester has had an on-going problem with a 10-year warranty for almost 10 years. During the arbitration process with the NHBC, he has been expected to pay for every arbitration case that has been brought. There is a list of about 65 different items, from the roof going wrong to the floor needing to be dug up, and he has been expected to pay his own costs for every arbitration claim. Will that issue be addressed in the review?

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing my attention to that case. As I emphasised earlier, I believe that the NHBC must address the effectiveness of both the conciliation and the arbitration service, because, although in principle the mechanism appears to amount to a sensible approach, I have heard too many cases, such as the one that my hon. Friend has raised, in which people have found it unsatisfactory in practice.

We do not want arrangements that, although they work in theory, do not provide effective reassurance and redress for members of the public who suffer experiences similar to those suffered by my hon. Friend's constituent. If my hon. Friend wants to write to me about that individual case, I shall undertake to raise it with the NHBC, but I give her the assurance that we are seeking general improvements in both the conciliation and the arbitration services, to ensure that the public can rely on them and not feel intimidated by costs or any other factor.

I shall await the NHBC's response to the outcome of our latest meeting, and to the letter that I sent to its chief executive afterwards, and the overhaul of its conciliation service, before considering whether the Government need to take further action in that area. I hope that my hon. Friends will accept, therefore, that I cannot say much more today on the subject, other than to reassure them that I am taking, and shall continue to take, a close interest in the matter.

In the past year, I have spoken to the other major provider of warranties for new home owners, Zurich Municipal, and to the Council of Mortgage Lenders. I have made it clear that warranties, from whatever source, should offer home owners comparable quality of protection and service in dealing with complains and sorting out problems.

I have also encouraged closer liaison between the NHBC and Zurich Municipal, to ensure that, although they are commercial competitors, they can work together against poor performance by house builders. Naturally, there was concern that if either company refused to accept a builder on to its register, it could lose business if the other company automatically took that builder on to its register. It is a legitimate concern, which I fully understand, and I want common standards to ensure that bad builders who fail to meet proper standards will be unacceptable to both main warranty providers. It is still early days, but I am hopeful that the dialogue will lead to effective action.

There is a question about potential conflict between the NHBC's role in providing warranties and its role as an approved inspector. In my view, there need not be conflict between those roles. It is not in the interests of the NHBC as a warranty provider that defects should appear that could lead to claims. For its part, the building control subsidiary has a statutory duty to take reasonable steps to satisfy itself that building work satisfies the building regulations. It also has a commercial interest in maintaining a reputation for effective inspection services against the background of growing competition from other approved inspectors and local authority building control.

I acknowledge the argument that if defects arise, NHBC staff may be more inclined to downplay them or argue that the defects were not initially present in the house as built, because to acknowledge defects would cast doubt on the NHBC's inspection role. However, I believe that the risk can be lessened by the management restructuring that the NHBC is undertaking. I await additional details of the NHBC's plans to put in place effective Chinese walls between the initial inspection staff and claims evaluation staff.

The NHBC's second role in relation to the building of new homes is the provision of building control services. It is important to see that aspect of the NHBC's work in the context of the framework provided by the building regulations. The construction of any new home is subject to the requirements of the building regulations in force at the time of construction. Those regulations are primarily concerned with protecting the health and safety of those in and around buildings. They place responsibilities on

the various parties involved in the construction of new buildings, and allow for action to be taken against them when they fail to comply with requirements.

A builder or developer intending to construct a new home is required by law to obtain building control approval. The general function of building control—whether provided by a local authority or an approved inspector—is to ensure, as far as possible, that building regulations are complied with.

I have no doubt that competition between different agencies involved in building control can help to ensure good value and choice to the public. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East mentioned the problem of fee setting by local authority building control. I have announced that I am working on regulations that will allow for the devolution of fee setting. I hope to make further progress on that soon.

I should like to reassure my hon. Friend that I am determined to ensure that competition in the provision of building control does not drive down standards; it must be seen to maintain and improve them. That is why I have consulted the Local Government Association, the Construction Industry Council and the Association of Corporate Approved Inspectors on ways of securing consistent building control standards and better conditions for competition, throughout the public and private sectors of building control. That is why I have welcomed the establishment of a steering group by those three bodies to draw up recommended standards and monitoring arrangements.

However, it should be remembered that building control—whoever provides it—can be only a checking process. It does not remove from the person carrying out building work the primary responsibility for ensuring that the work complies with the regulations.

My hon. Friend mentioned the number of inspections carried out by local authorities and by the NHBC. It is true that, where local authorities carry out building control, there are several stages at which the authority must be given an opportunity to inspect. However, it is for each local authority to decide how many inspections to make in each case.

Approved inspectors must also decide in each case what inspections to make to fulfil their duties. I understand that, on average, the NHBC inspects properties 11 times in cases where it is carrying out both warranty inspections and building control inspections.

I believe that we should concentrate on ways of consolidating and improving standards of building control in both sectors. Building control can be only a checking process, not a substitute for builders' own quality control, but I want building control to provide the best realistic level of confidence that the regulations have been complied with.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East mentioned various matters involving the conveyancing system, including surveys and logbooks. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing has set up a working party, with the Lord Chancellor's Department and other interested parties, to review the house purchase process. That will consider these and other relevant matters, and will, I hope, report later in the year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton mentioned cowboy builders. He rightly highlighted the serious problems encountered by members of the public as a result of the behaviour of disreputable and rogue traders, who provide a poor standard of service and poor value for money, and who often fail to provide any remedy when their failings are brought to light.

It is essential that effective measures are in place to tackle the problems of cowboys, so we published our consultation paper on the subject earlier this month. The paper sets out several options for tackling the problem and providing better information to the public on reputable builders. We intend to drive forward those proposals, but we shall do so very much in the light of the evidence submitted to us as a result of the consultation.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton intends to submit his views and those of related organisations; I very much look forward to reading them. We shall take full account of his views and others submitted in the consultation, to ensure that we have really effective measures to tackle the problem of cowboy builders.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Hospital Waiting Lists

1. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What representations he has received regarding hospital waiting lists in Wales. [37999]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): Other than in respect of individual cases, none. Reducing the time people have to wait for treatment remains a priority for the Government. The additional £25 million for waiting lists announced in the Budget will be targeted at reducing lists to below the levels applying when we took office.

Miss McIntosh: Bearing in mind his reply, will the Minister explain to the House today why, according to his statistics given in answer to a question on 23 March, waiting lists in Wales have increased by 3,000 since the Labour party came to office? What additional resources and new money is the Minister able to put at the disposal of the health service in Wales in order to reduce waiting lists and meet the pledge that Labour made at the election one year ago?

Mr. Griffiths: Quite simply, the £25 million that was announced in the Budget in March was made available specifically to deal with the fact that waiting lists in Wales are growing. The hon. Lady may be aware that admission rates in Wales are 11 per cent. higher than those in England because of the poorer health of the Welsh people. In the longer term, we are planning to tackle more fundamental issues to ensure that the people of Wales become healthier.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): As to the future of hospitals, is the Minister aware that hardly an individual or organisation in north Gwent supports his proposed reconfiguration of NHS trusts? Is the Minister willing to recognise that Blaenau Gwent has some of the worst health problems not just in Wales, but in the United Kingdom, and that we should be accorded trust status like that which he has granted, quite correctly, to Cynon Valley?

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend will know that we are committed to ensuring that Blaenau Gwent, like other parts of Wales, gets a better health service as a result of our trust reconfiguration exercise. One purpose of that exercise is to ensure that money previously spent on administration can be spent directly on patient care. My main concern is that the proposals for Gwent will show where the benefits lie for all people in Gwent—especially those with the poorest health, such as my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is the Minister not being dreadfully complacent about the health of the people of Wales? He responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) by saying that admission rates were 11 per cent. higher in Wales than in England because of the poorer health of the Welsh people. On 5 February, a Green Paper addressing the health of the people of England was published, and another Green Paper was released dealing with the health of people in Scotland, yet we still await the publication of a Green Paper addressing the health needs of the people of Wales. Is it not about time that the Government began to direct their attention towards the health of the people of Wales? Can the Minister tell the House this afternoon when we can expect the publication of that Green Paper?

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman will realise that we have the legacy of 18 years of Tory rule to overcome. We made £9.5 million available to deal with winter emergencies, which went extremely well in Wales, and, since then, we have provided another £25 million more than his Government wanted to provide. The Green Paper will appear before the next Welsh questions.

European Structural Funds

2. **Ms Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): If he will make a statement on the renegotiation of the European structural funds. [38000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): As Welsh gross domestic product per capita is extremely low by comparison with both the European Union and Great Britain averages, the Government believe that Wales is entitled to secure the maximum benefit from the structural funds after 1999.

Ms Lawrence: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential that Wales does not lose out to other parts of Europe in the current negotiations on structural funds? Will he reaffirm to the House his determination to pursue GDP as the basis for reform, bearing in mind the fact that my constituency and a great proportion of Wales suffer some of the lowest incomes in Europe, particularly as a result of the failures of the previous Government?

Mr. Hain: I agree with my hon. Friend that Wales is one of the poorest regions of Europe, and that must be recognised in Brussels as it is recognised by the Government. The Welsh GDP per capita is just 80 per cent. of the European average, and the UK stands at 96 per cent. That indicates the leeway that we have to make up. With regard to my hon. Friend's constituency, Pembrokeshire's GDP per capita is extremely low, sitting at just 60 per cent. or so of the European average. We must get the aid from Brussels to which we believe we are entitled.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Minister share my view that the period for regional funds between 1994 and 2004 is possibly the last for which Wales may get significant benefits from European funding? If that is the case, does he share my view that the responsibility of the Government and of all of us who represent seats in Wales is to press for objective 1 status for those parts of Wales that would qualify? If the Minister agrees, can he tell us when the application will go in and whether Eurostat has agreed the new NUTS 2—nomenclature of units of territorial statistics—areas for Wales?

Mr. Hain: I agree that this is a critical time for Wales to make sure that it gets the benefits to which I believe

we are entitled under the structural funds review, because thereafter, enlargement will inevitably compress the availability of funds even to Wales. With that in mind, we have submitted a detailed and compelling case for west Wales and the valleys to the Office for National Statistics in order that Wales's case may be argued in the strongest terms.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): To reinforce my hon. Friend's case, is he aware that the Cardiff business school estimates that in Merthyr, for example, GDP is only 67 per cent. of the European average and that in Blaenau Gwent, it is 62 per cent? Will he carry the message from the House and from Welsh Members to the European Commission that we will not tolerate the changes that are proposed and the destruction of European structural aid to communities such as ours?

Mr. Hain: I will certainly convey to all the appropriate authorities the fact that areas such as Merthyr and other valley constituencies, in common with west Wales constituencies and authorities, have very low levels of GDP per capita—some, like Merthyr's, standing at about 60 per cent. of the European average. That reveals the compelling nature of the case that the Government are advancing for Wales to receive objective 1 status for west Wales and the valleys. There are such low levels of GDP that we need and are entitled to European structural funds to give those areas the support that they need.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Will the Minister give the House and the people of Wales a categorical assurance that the outcome of the negotiations on the European structural funds will be as good for Wales as that achieved by the previous Conservative Government—*[Interruption.]* It is a very simple question. If the outcome is not as good, will he undertake that he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, if they are both still in office then, will resign?

Mr. Hain: I wonder where the right hon. Gentleman has been for the past few years. It was under the previous Conservative Government that Wales lost out. The representations made by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) dismally failed to present the case for Wales. An editorial in *The Times* this morning reads:

"The more immediate question is whether anything at all lurks inside the Conservative cranium."

Mr. Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Is my hon. Friend aware that when the structural funds were revisited previously under the Conservative Government, a senior civil servant in Brussels said that north Wales had the worst deal in the whole of Europe? Will my hon. Friend outline the measures that he is taking to ensure that north Wales, which includes the county of Conwy which has the lowest foreign inward investment level in Europe, the lowest pay in the United Kingdom and the lowest gross domestic product levels in Wales, does not lose out again?

Mr. Hain: I fully understand the points that my hon. Friend is making, together with my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) and for Conwy (Mrs. Williams). The argument advanced on behalf of Conwy and Denbighshire is very strong. That is why we have included both areas within the claim that we are making for recognition for NUTS 2—nomenclature of units of territorial statistics—status for west Wales and the valleys. My hon. Friend presents a strong argument that north-west Wales has lost out progressively over the past 18 years of dismal Conservative Governments. That is what has strengthened the region's case for support from Brussels.

Mr. Ancram: We shall wait and see.

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman says that we shall wait and see. We are pressing Wales's case extremely hard and the Government recognise that it is extremely powerful.

Farming

3. **Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): What meetings he has had recently with farmers' representatives to discuss problems in Welsh farming. [38001]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): Since taking office, I have met farmers' representatives on 15 formal and countless informal occasions to discuss the problems facing Welsh agriculture.

The right hon. Gentleman may like to know that the Welsh Grand Committee next meets in Carmarthen on 5 May to discuss the rural economy in Wales. I am making arrangements for the representatives of the three farming organisations in Wales to present evidence to hon. Members prior to the sitting of the Committee. Such an innovative procedure will, I believe, help to inform the Welsh Grand Committee's debate on this crucial issue and demonstrates this Government's commitment to an open and inclusive approach.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) will accept my invitation to be present on that occasion.

Mr. Curry: Is the Secretary of State aware that farmers at that meeting are likely to raise the report produced by Professor Peter Midmore on the particular importance of upland livestock compensatory amounts to Welsh farmers? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the sentiments of that report, which are that a consistent and realistic level of support is essential to maintain agriculture on the hills of Wales? Does he also agree that, last year, the Government failed abysmally to meet those expectations? What will he do in subsequent years to ensure that he fulfils his own claims that the Labour party is the party of the rural economy?

Mr. Davies: I am familiar with Professor Midmore's report. In fact, I met Professor Midmore a couple of weeks ago to discuss it in detail. I am pleased to say that he and I had an amicable discussion and agreed on the best way forward for Welsh agriculture.

The right hon. Gentleman was, I believe, a Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from 1989 to 1993. If there is any one crisis hanging over British agriculture, it is the spectre of BSE, which brought a once-great industry to its knees. It has cost British taxpayers about £3.5 billion. The right hon. Gentleman

was the Minister who, above all else, characterised the then Government's inept handling of BSE by his own incompetence and complacency.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Will my right hon. Friend inform us what progress is being made in getting the beef export ban lifted in Europe?

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interest in this matter. I know that he has made many representations to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He will know that many representations have been made at a European level. We were successful several weeks ago in getting the Irish scheme off the ground. That will be of great assistance to exporters from Ireland and, I believe, prove to be the crucial breakthrough in our discussions at a European level.

My hon. Friend will know that we have successfully introduced the passporting scheme and that the Government, rather than individual producers, are footing the bill for it. I have no doubt that that scheme will forward our efforts to remove the beef ban. I assure my hon. Friend that if the previous Government had been more constructive in their approach to Europe, we should not have had such difficulties over the past 12 months in reassuring our European Union partners that we want to work with them in a spirit of co-operation to complete the central objective of our policy, which is the removal of the beef ban.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcome the fact that the farming unions will give evidence to the Welsh Grand Committee in a few weeks' time. What will be the Secretary of State's answer when he is asked why there has been a cut of £80 million from forthcoming agricultural spending in Wales?

Mr. Davies: As the hon. Gentleman knows, he is referring to the expenditure report that was produced several weeks ago. If he looks at it carefully, he will see that last year's expenditure was inflated by a one-off payment to the upland areas of Wales. That, together with the increase that was made available as part of the beef compensation package, has not yet been included in next year's expenditure. The other element of the equation is the sheep special payment which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, depends on market prices. It is a compensation payment and at this stage, it is not possible to calculate what it will be. The Government's total approach to agriculture shows that we have a real commitment, and that is demonstrated by our discussions in Europe, by our commitment to pay additional compensation to relieve the present crisis in the livestock industry and by the way in which we are promoting other initiatives, such as the agri-environmental scheme and our various food promotion schemes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that in the debate, the Government will be able to demonstrate that we recognise the real crisis in the Welsh countryside. We are doing what we can in a practical way to help to ameliorate those difficulties.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): In relation to the invitation to the Welsh Grand Committee to which the Secretary of State referred, may I say that I first received it through the offices of the press, secondly by fax and lastly by letter? If he checks his fax machine on his return to his office he will find an answer. Does he not agree that, as a result of reduced Government support, falling prices and the high value of the green pound, which has been brought about by five interest rate rises since the election, farm incomes in Wales are dropping catastrophically, by as much as 60 per cent. in some cases? Does he not realise the scale of the crisis for farmers and their families, and for the Welsh rural economy? When will he and the Government stop mouthing complacent platitudes and playing design games with the Welsh flag and do something real for the farmers of Wales?

Mr. Davies: If the right hon. Gentleman reflects, he will realise that he is putting an unusual proposition. It is that in our period in office of less than 12 months, we should have been able to resolve all the difficulties over which he and his colleagues presided in government for 18 years. It is not possible to turn around those difficulties in less than 12 months. I acknowledge, as I have always acknowledged, the difficulties that face all those who live and work in rural Wales. That is why we are striving to put in place the long-term mechanisms that are necessary to deal with those problems. I commend the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru for ensuring a proper debate in the Welsh Grand Committee. The constructive way in which those two parties are viewing events in Wales is markedly different from the mindless opposition of the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends.

Health Action Zones

4. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): If he will set up health action zones in Wales. [38002]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): The inequalities in health status in Wales are a major concern, and action across a broad front is required. I shall publish a Green Paper shortly which will propose a range of new measures which take account of the circumstances in Wales. In England, health action zones will cover populations of around 200,000. In Wales, it would not be appropriate to work on such a scale, but in our Green Paper, we will bring forward alternative proposals tailored to meet Welsh needs.

Ann Clwyd: I am sure that that announcement will be welcomed in Wales as much as it was in England. It brings an holistic approach to poverty and deprivation in Wales as elsewhere. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that these matters will be given even greater consideration in the future Welsh assembly, especially if 50 per cent. of its membership are women.

Mr. Griffiths: We are very much aware of the health needs of Wales. My hon. Friend's constituency is an area of high need. I hope that our Green Paper will bring forward some fresh thinking on how to tackle these problems, and that the local health groups proposed in our White Paper will make a significant contribution by bringing together the health service and local government to think about health care issues.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): How does the Minister expect to be able to save money by reducing

bureaucracy in the health service in Wales when measures such as health action zones will create more bureaucracy, not less?

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman could not have been listening to my answer. I said specifically that we would bring forward proposals tailored to meet Welsh needs. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the thrust of our proposals in Wales is to reduce bureaucracy and administration, and to use that money in patient care. Over the lifetime of this Parliament, we reckon to save £50 million.

Cetaceans

5. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What recent assessment he has made of the cetacean population in Cardigan bay. [38003]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): Recent studies indicate that the most common cetacean species in Cardigan bay are the harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin. Other species recorded are the common dolphin, Risso's dolphin, the white-sided dolphin and the killer pilot and minke whales.

Mr. Baker: Given the importance of the area to those various species, does the Minister agree that, given the June deadline, it is crucial that the Government make it a special area of conservation under the EU habitats directive?

Mr. Griffiths: I can give the hon. Gentleman the good news. We have already put forward a proposal for Cardigan bay to be a special area of conservation.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Is the Minister aware of any reported sightings of that other endangered species, namely, elected Tory Members of Parliament for Wales? Is he aware that there is a danger of that species being reintroduced to the native Welsh habitat following the elections in May to the National Assembly for Wales?

Mr. Griffiths: Although it is likely that in Wales they may become a land creature again, there is no possibility that they will end up in Cardigan bay. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. A telephone is ringing.

New Deal

6. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): What assessment he has made of the impact of Government policies on the employment prospects of the under-25s in Wales. [38004]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): Under the new deal, modern apprenticeships and our planned national traineeships, young people in Wales now have the best opportunity in generations to get and keep a job.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Does the Minister regret the fact that the new deal has now been launched nationwide without sufficient time having been given to examine the experience in pathfinder areas such as that in Wales? Does the Minister agree with the Labour Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Employment who warned at a recent public hearing with the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights that, owing to the problem that new dealers might take away job opportunities from those already looking for work, after six months, "new deal" might become a dirty word on the street?

Mr. Hain: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman has been. The pathfinder experience in south-west Wales has been very good. We found 1,500 jobs pledged for youngsters who previously had no hope of a job. A total of 350 employers have given those pledges and there is a real prospect now of people being given opportunities when they never had them before. We are confident that 17,000 places on the new deal will be filled in the coming year and that will give a fantastic opportunity of a lifetime to people whom the Conservative party abandoned over 18 miserable years.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Does my hon. Friend agree with the manager of my local Employment Service who said that the new deal in Wales was the best scheme that he had ever seen in the 35 years that he had worked in the service? Will my hon. Friend comment on the number of people who are taking up the new deal in Wales and on the number of companies that are involved? When is the new deal likely to be extended to over-25s in Wales?

Mr. Hain: The new deal will be extended to over-25s in June. That will give them an opportunity from which young people throughout Wales now benefit by the thousand. The new deal is a very exciting programme for young people and businesses, and, for the first time in a generation, it gives Employment Service officials the opportunity to help people into work, rather than simply push them aside and off the claimant figures. The new deal is a unique combination of skills, high-quality training and high-quality job experience. That should be supported, not denigrated, by every hon. Member.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I wish the new deal well, but does the Minister accept that there are two prerequisites for it to succeed? The first is that there are long-term permanent jobs into which people can slot after having their training and going through the new deal. The second is that there is an adequate number of proper trainers, which is being undermined by the reduction in money that is available in Wales for training and enterprise councils. How will he ensure that those two requirements are met so that the new deal will succeed?

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman rightly raises specific points. The first issue is whether there is a permanent job at the end of the new deal programme. If the employability of those in Wales who are participating by the thousand in the new deal is increased, as it will be, their prospects of a job will be greatly enhanced. In addition, businesses in pathfinder areas that have taken on new deal participants find that the programme gives them opportunities to develop their businesses and thereby offer those individuals permanent jobs.

On training, we have injected additional resources through the new deal. That should make up any fall in overall provision through the TECs.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Liz Marsh of the Employment Service and Vale of Glamorgan council on the launch of new deal contracts last Friday, which will result in 160 under-25-year-olds getting jobs in my constituency? Will he join me in thanking the 73 employers who have expressed an interest in taking part in the new deal?

Mr. Hain: Yes, I will join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those involved in the Vale of Glamorgan and throughout Wales. Conservative Members should join us in ensuring that the new deal works. Labour Members, in common with some Opposition Members, are taking part in launches to get businesses involved and to ensure that the new deal is a success throughout the country. Conservative Members should be doing the same, rather than moaning and groaning about the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that this Government are giving young people.

Development Board for Rural Wales

7. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): What representations he has received regarding the decision to merge the Development Board for Rural Wales with the Welsh Development Agency. [38005]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): I have received a large number of representations from hon. Members, organisations in mid-Wales and members of staff of the agencies, all of which underline the importance of the new agency's role in developing the rural economy. I give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the task of developing the rural economy will be a priority for the new organisation.

Mr. Lansley: If the Secretary of State is so enthusiastic about devolution and an assembly for Wales, why has he decided to wind up the Development Board for Rural Wales, rather than give the assembly the opportunity to decide whether the DBRW should have a continuing role—given that there is every reason to have a body that is devoted to the particular and often acute needs of rural Wales?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman will understand that it was the people of Wales on 18 September who endorsed these plans. We spelled out our proposals for the merger of the Welsh Development Agency and the DBRW when we put those plans to the people in the referendum. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the House of Commons gave overwhelming support on Second Reading to the Bill that makes provision for the merger, and he will know that his party gave those plans tacit approval when it abstained on the Third Reading vote a couple of weeks ago.

I remind the hon. Gentleman of the debate last night in the other place, which gave the Bill an unopposed Second Reading. The report of that debate shows that there is broad support, across all the parties, for an essential programme that will be vital to the Government's task of modernising the British constitution.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik)—who is making a good recovery following his accident—and I are very concerned that only one member of DBRW staff has been appointed to the powerhouse agency? It looks as though rural affairs will be dominated by Cardiff. Will he assure me that the expertise of more members will be used?

Mr. Davies: I have sent a card, on behalf of all at the Welsh Office, to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire, and I look forward to his early return to Parliament. It was typical of the hon. Gentleman that he should spend his Easter in the daring way that resulted in his accident. I hope that he will be back with us shortly.

I assure the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) that there will be a rural policy unit within the powerhouse agency, and that it will be based in the old DBRW area. I have no intention of allowing the new agency to ignore its responsibility for driving forward the rural economy. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the rural policy unit will be not only based in the old DBRW area but staffed by people who understand the problems of the area. The unit will play a crucial role in influencing the attitude of the whole of the new powerhouse agency, bringing economic prosperity throughout Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [38029] **Ms Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 22 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I will have further such meetings later today.

Ms Perham: I welcome my right hon. Friend's efforts in the cause of peace in both Ireland and the middle east. As he knows, there is a large and thriving Jewish community in Ilford, North. In the light of the 50th anniversary of Israeli independence, what are my right hon. Friend's hopes for the summit in London on 4 May and for the reinvigoration of the peace process and a real prospect of stability and security for Israel and her neighbours?

The Prime Minister: The present stalemate in the middle east process is obviously dangerous for those immediately concerned, for the region and for wider stability throughout the world. I am pleased that Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat have agreed to come to London for meetings on 4 May with the United States Secretary of State. I plan to meet both of them as well.

We will play any role that it is helpful for us to play, although I stress again that we should not cut across anything being done by the United States. I believe that, if there is good will on both sides, progress can be made.

If progress is not made, the dispute will continue to threaten not only the stability of the middle east, but the stability of the entire world.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I want to take this first opportunity in Prime Minister's questions to welcome the agreement in Northern Ireland and to congratulate the Prime Minister on the role that he played in it. I also pay tribute to everyone who has shown courage and integrity in the search for peace. I reiterate the Opposition's support for the Government in the difficult job of turning the agreement into a lasting peace.

Against that background, will the Prime Minister give reassurance to those of us who are naturally uncomfortable with the early release of prisoners? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that before a terrorist prisoner is freed, it will be established that he does not pose a risk to the public? Will the right hon. Gentleman also assure us that, in the proposals for the Royal Ulster Constabulary—whose courage has been so great for so long—we can be confident that the integrity of policing in Northern Ireland will never be undermined?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support and, indeed, for his offer that we campaign together in the referendum, which I welcome. I also pay tribute to the former Prime Minister for the work that he did in bringing about this settlement.

The right hon. Gentleman raised two specific points. First, I can confirm that prisoners who are a threat or who are attached to organisations that are carrying on violence will not be eligible for early release under this proposal. Those who are released are, in any event, released on licence, and that point must be well emphasised.

Secondly, in respect of policing, I again pay tribute to the work that the RUC has done. I emphasise absolutely that there is no intention whatever of having anything other than a police force that can carry out the work of policing. The desire is simply to make sure that it can do so with the support and active consent of all sides of the community in Northern Ireland. There is no question of having paramilitaries running around organising local police establishments, and so on. I am happy to lay those fears to rest and to assure people that the independent commission will look at all these things in the context of making sure that we have a successful police service for all the community in future.

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that reply. Naturally, we are also concerned that no decommissioning of terrorist weapons took place in the run-up to the agreement. I welcome the undertaking given by the Prime Minister in a letter to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that no Member of the New Assembly will be appointed a Minister until any paramilitary associates that he may have had have engaged in substantial decommissioning. Is the Prime Minister happy to reaffirm that reassurance today?

The Prime Minister: Yes. We said that we want the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland. The agreement provides for the process to start immediately and, indeed, to be completed within two years. Meanwhile, it would obviously be a travesty of democracy if parties associated with paramilitary organisations held Executive office in the assembly while they continued to be engaged in or to threaten terrorism. It is precisely for that reason that the agreement provides that those Members of the Assembly can be excluded or removed from office if they fail to live up to their commitments. We have made it clear that we will keep these provisions under review and strengthen them if necessary.

Mr. Hague: While again welcoming the Prime Minister's reply and accepting that this undertaking cannot be given effect under the heads of agreement, may I ask whether he will consider incorporating the undertaking in the legislation setting up the assembly, which is to be introduced later this year? Such an intention would again have the very strong support of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. We made it clear in the letter that I wrote to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, that if, over the first six months or so, these provisions are shown to be ineffective, we shall support changes to give them real teeth. The way to do that is obviously a matter for consideration, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I am well aware of the necessity for people to be sure that those who hold Executive office in the assembly are genuinely committed to peace. If they are not genuinely committed to peace, it will be very difficult for people to work with them in any event, but it is important that we have that clearly established right at the very beginning.

Once again, I pay tribute to the courage of the leader of the Ulster Unionists in particular in the work that he has done to bring about this agreement. We have an agreement that in the end can work only if all parties decide to make it work. There is a limit to what we can do, in the House or elsewhere, if people are not genuinely committed to a package that is balanced and sensible and based on principled work. I believe that we have such a package. We have designed the structure, as it were, for peace, but now people have to get on and build it.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his initiative and on managing to get the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President to come to London to restart the peace talks? The best prize that those who want to support Israel can give Israel and the Palestinians is an arena in which they can talk to each other as a means of moving towards a resolution of the problems between the two countries. The reward for Israel is peace with all its Arab neighbours; will not that reward come about only with the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli state in that area?

The Prime Minister: As I said a couple of days ago, the final status talks will examine what it means to give the Palestinians self-determination, in which statehood is an option. Many people in Israel are discussing that. Progress is possible, but interim issues—not just economic issues but the issue of redeployment—have to be resolved as quickly as possible to allow the final status talks to get under way. We shall certainly do everything that we can to facilitate that.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The world economic competitiveness league tables published today show

Britain once again near the bottom of the world league tables for education. Does the Prime Minister think that the position will be improved by forcing schools to sack more teachers and having class sizes at a 20-year high and rising?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely because we realise the link between education and competitiveness that we are putting so much more money into education. Not only are we putting in extra resources this year in respect of current spending, but we are putting extra resources into the school building programme and technology for schools. In each case, we are putting in more than the right hon. Gentleman's party ever asked for before the election.

Mr. Ashdown: Of course we know the Prime Minister's familiar claims about the money that the Government are putting into education and health. Frankly, they require a degree of economic manipulation that would make Arthur Daley blush. Let me turn from inputs to outputs and ask the Prime Minister a very simple question: does he really believe that those who voted Labour last year to improve the quality of their child's education seriously expected their child's school to have to sack another teacher this year or for their child to be educated in a class that was too large under the Tories, but is getting larger under Labour?

The Prime Minister: They expected us to keep our commitments, and we are doing that. We are not merely putting additional money into education; we also got rid of the nursery voucher scheme and replaced it with proper nursery education. We are putting more money into the school building programme than any Government have ever done and we are also ensuring that schools get the help that they need with new technology. Of course it will take time, but it is utterly irresponsible for Liberal Democrats to say that all the problems not just in local government but in respect of the national health service, education, pensions and the environment can be tackled by a possible 1p extra that they may or may not put into the education system. It really is not a serious way of conducting politics and I believe that the public know it.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): In view of the devastating losses suffered by people in Northampton and elsewhere in the midlands during the Easter floods, including the loss of life, what assurances can my right hon. Friend give people in Northampton and the midlands that lessons will be learned, especially in relation to early warning systems, flood defences, planning issues and the pressing financial needs of people who lost everything during the floods?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can give that assurance. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has already said that local authorities and others facing extraordinary claims as a result of the flooding can make claims under the so-called Bellwin scheme and they will be considered very sympathetically. May I take this opportunity, as I am sure my hon. Friend would wish me to do so, to pay tribute to all the emergency services who worked so hard and well to cope with the emergency that existed?

Q2. [38030] **Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): Is the Prime Minister aware that, when Cherwell district council was Conservative controlled, the district council precept for band D council tax was just £1? Now, after three years of Labour control, it is a staggering £55, with no improvement whatever in services. Given what Labour has done to Oxfordshire county council this year—the average council tax will be £100 more than it was two years ago—with a double-digit increase in council tax bills at the same time as cuts in social services and education, does the Prime Minister find it surprising that in a number of wards in my constituency the Labour party is not daring to put up candidates for the local government elections on 7 May?

The Prime Minister: I think that it was unwise of the hon. Gentleman to raise his last point, as, throughout the country, the Conservatives are failing to put up candidates in more than double the seats than is the case for the Labour party. He will be aware that the average council tax is lower in Labour areas than in Conservative areas.

Q3. [38031] **Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in contrast to what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said, there is widespread delight in the south-west at the extra Government money for schools, including brand new schools in my constituency and in Torridge and West Devon? That is after waiting 50 years during which the Tories did nothing.

In the autumn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer ruled out the United Kingdom's joining the single currency before the next election except in unforeseen circumstances. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the artificial strength of the pound, possibly for the next couple of years, could represent those unforeseen circumstances?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with the first part of the question. On the second part, I believe that the decision whether to join the euro must be part of a longer-term process than the fluctuations in the market value of the pound. Two thirds of the appreciation of the pound happened before May last year. Boom and bust, however, would be the worst possible outcome for industry, manufacturers and others. It is essential that we take the measures both to cure the Budget deficit that we inherited and to ensure monetary stability over the long term. We have done that, which is one reason why long-term interest rates are now below the level that we inherited last May.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I must warn the Prime Minister that this question is not answerable with the term "boom or bust" anywhere in the text. When will he extend the clemency that, at his instructions or with his consent, has been granted to murderers and terrorists in Northern Ireland, who have been released from long prison sentences, to British service men, who, believing themselves to be either defending their comrades in arms or acting in the service of the Crown, remain in prison?

The Prime Minister: As the Secretary of State said on Monday, we are considering the cases of the two people to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred. I believe that what we have put forward on prisoners is right and justifiable as part of the wider deal and package. As we

made clear, there is no question of allowing anyone out, even on licence, unless we are satisfied that that person does not pose a threat to security or safety.

Q4. [38032] **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): In connection with the middle east peace summit in London, does my right hon. Friend agree that, in seeking to reopen the Oslo peace process and to regain the trust of the Palestinian people, it is crucial that the Israeli Government give firm assurances that they will desist from the policy of building and expanding the illegal settlements?

The Prime Minister: Again, as I said yesterday, it is important that there is time out on unilateral actions, including settlements. It is now essential that we reach the point at which, on 4 May, we see exactly what the differences are on these interim agreements, which cover the range of issues, and then, as soon as they are resolved, proceed to the final status talks. In the end, that will be the only way—in respect of settlements or anything else—in which we can provide stability in the middle east in the long term.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Although it would be churlish, Prime Minister, not to wish you well in your efforts for peace in Northern Ireland, despite one's reservations about their success, perhaps you—not only as Prime Minister, but as a lawyer—will answer the following points. First, is it open to one party to a multiple agreement unilaterally to give assurances about the agreement's alteration, whether on decommissioning, the review of the police or the release of prisoners? Secondly, are you aware—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Member should say, "Is the right hon. Gentleman aware".

Mr. McCartney: I beg your pardon, Madam Speaker.

Is the Prime Minister aware that Sinn Fein will claim that it is a political party with a mandate and that it is not the IRA and does not possess any weapons? Any suggestion that it should be expelled either from the assembly or from office will meet the same response that was given in relation to entry to the talks: "We are not the IRA."

The Prime Minister: Of course I am aware that that is Sinn Fein's claim. It is precisely because of our position on that issue that it was expelled from the talks for a time, as were loyalist political organisations attached to paramilitary groups. I made it clear, and I make it clear again now, that we will support changes if the existing provisions are not working properly, but the hon. and learned Gentleman must recognise that the package, because it is based on principle, offers the chance of a way forward in Northern Ireland.

The principle is that the basis of consent is secured. There will be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the people there—that is, after all, the historical principle for which people who say that they support the hon. and learned Gentleman's position have been fighting for years and years and years—and that principle will be balanced by a proper recognition of nationalist identity and fair and equal treatment for all.

Anyone should be able to recommend that position to their people as a right, proper, fair way forward for the future; and it is the future that we should start addressing.

Q5. [38033] **Mr. Eric Clarke** (Midlothian): What efforts have the Government made to alleviate the economic crisis in south-east Asia, bearing in mind the fact that many thousands of workers in the United Kingdom are employed directly or indirectly by companies from that part of the world?

The Prime Minister: We are doing what we can. We are fully engaged in seeking global solutions to Asia's economic problems. We have been movers and motivators behind the International Monetary Fund package of help to some of the south-east Asian economies, which has produced greater stability, especially in Korea. We continue to work with those countries to produce that stability. The crisis in Asia will inevitably have a knock-on effect on all our economies, but we are doing what we can.

We recognise the fact that a large number of Scottish jobs are dependent on those Asian economies and we will use both the European Union and our position as chairman of the Group of Eight countries to try to improve the financial systems in south-east Asian economies. In the end, that will be our best guarantee that the problems can be ironed out and that they can resume the steady growth that benefits us all.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Does the Prime Minister agree with the judgment of the sheriff court in Selkirk that the beef-on-the-bone regulations are a manifest absurdity? Will he repeal this ridiculous ban?

The Prime Minister: No. The reason for the decision was the recommendation of the chief medical officer, who said:

"I strongly advise that it be done."

The judgment was based on a technicality and leave to appeal has been given. I do not think that it would be right to act against the representations of the chief medical officer.

Mr. Hague: It is no good hiding behind the chief medical officer. Ministers are paid to make judgments and to take responsibility for them. Is it not the truth that the regulations were drafted in haste and without proper consultation? The Institute of Trading Standards Administration says that the Government have left it to enforce the unenforceable. With a legal touch like that, it is no wonder the Prime Minister gave up the Bar for politics—unlike the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who sometimes gives up politics for the bar.

According to the judge, the Minister of Agriculture has destroyed the present system of meat distribution and undermined the Food Safety Act 1990 in one sentence. How much confidence does the Prime Minister now have in him?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman says about the judgment happens to be wrong. It was based on a technicality, and we have been given leave to appeal. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture has always said, it is necessary for the ban to

remain until the scientific and medical evidence shows that the threat is receding. In the light of the history of bovine spongiform encephalopathy—the right hon. Gentleman will be familiar with that—it would not be sensible to act contrary to the strong advice of the chief medical officer, which I quoted. If the right hon. Gentleman believes that it would be right, he is not acting responsibly.

Mr. Hague: I asked the Prime Minister about confidence in the Minister of Agriculture, and we have not heard much about that. The ban has been described by consumers as unnecessary, by retailers as ridiculous, by inspectors as unenforceable and now by judges as absurd. Is it not time that the Government exercised a bit of common sense and said that, in a free country, people should choose for themselves?

The Prime Minister: No. If I may correct the right hon. Gentleman: first, environmental officers have not said that they cannot enforce the ban and, secondly, the Consumers Association actually welcomed the decision on it; so he is wrong on both those counts. Thirdly, it is at least arguable—the inquiry will demonstrate this or not—that we are in this mess over BSE precisely because the previous Government failed to act, which has left us with a bill for BSE that is running to £2 billion a year. We are now having to engage in the difficult process of getting that ban lifted. The first part of it is under way in Northern Ireland and I very much hope that, in the next few weeks, we will get the rest of the ban lifted through the date-based scheme. It would not be sensible for us to act against the express advice of the chief medical officer. If the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member had acted a little more responsibly in the early years, we would perhaps not have faced the colossal mess in which the Conservative party put us and from which we are trying to extricate ourselves.

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Does the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the new basis for calculating the unemployment statistics? Is that not giving us a true and honest picture of the jobless rate? Does he also agree that that is in stark contrast to the past 18 years, when there were 35 different methods of calculating the rate and the Tories continually fiddled the unemployment figures?

The Prime Minister: Fiddled figures—that brings back happy memories of all those press releases.

It is right that we should make the figures a sensible expression of true unemployment levels and it brings us into line with internationally accepted standards. I am delighted that the Office for National Statistics has done it; it is right and I support it.

Q6. [38034] **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): Is the Prime Minister aware that the Christie hospital, which is the north-west of England's regional specialist centre for cancer treatment, is in the depths of a financial crisis and has had to close down a £1 million linear accelerator machine? Is he further aware that the national health service guidelines recommend that people receive radiotherapy in two weeks and that they are having to wait five? How does he square that with the priority that he says he is giving to cancer treatment and what is he going to do about it?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps, first, the hon. Gentleman could indicate by a nod of his head whether he supported the spending plans of the previous Conservative Government on the health service—*[Interruption.]* It is hardly surprising that the hon. Gentleman will not tell us. The Government are putting in an extra £2 billion this year, over and above the money allocated by the previous Government. Obviously, it is important that we carry on making improvements as we can to the NHS, and we are spending far more on cancer treatment than the previous Government. I accept that there is a still a lot more to do, but let us be clear that what we are doing is clearing up what we inherited from 18 years of Conservative Government.

Q7. [38035] **Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): At a time when we are trying to encourage responsible citizenship, does the Prime Minister agree that it is also appropriate to support the nations that are trying to deal with any potential threat from the misuse of nuclear material? If we chose to sit on our hands or turn our faces away from the problem, as some people encourage us to do, it would not only set a dreadful example of citizenship but be a terrible betrayal of those other nations that are seeking to deal with that difficult problem.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. May I point out to the House two facts, which have been absent from some newspaper reports today? First, the total amount of intermediate waste that will be added to Dounreay is two drums-worth; 14,000 are already stored there. Secondly, it is quite wrong to say that the United Kingdom alone is taking action. The United States has already taken 350 kg of irradiated HEU.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Highly enriched uranium.

The Prime Minister: The United States has also taken 600 kg of unused highly enriched uranium from Kazakhstan, and Russia has taken 137 kg from Iraq since the Gulf war. *[Interruption.]* Other European countries are making other contributions. That is why we thought it important to do what we did. As secrecy has been shouted about, I must point out, first, that we have followed the normal rules for transportation of civil nuclear fuel. Secondly, we could not, of course, make an announcement as such, because the reason for our action was the fear of rebels taking over the civil nuclear reactor again. Thirdly, we had already prepared a parliamentary answer, and we shall give full details the moment that the transportation has occurred, which is entirely in line with normal practice.

Q8. [38036] **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): Is the Prime Minister willing to employ his boyish charm and that engaging smile—I want him to say yes—in talking to the French authorities, to sort them out and to ask them to agree to a fair deal for British fans for allocation of World cup tickets?

The Prime Minister: We are concerned about the situation. I gather that 10 million calls had been made to the French authorities by lunchtime. We are in touch with them about how we can improve both the allocation of World cup tickets and the system of allocation. I cannot offer an instant result, but I shall do my best to ensure that British fans are treated fairly and to improve the system for allocation of World cup tickets. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in hoping that, when fans get their tickets and go to the games, they will see victories for British teams.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Points of order come after questions, and I have a private notice question.

Nuclear Material (Reprocessing)

3.31 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the agreement to reprocess nuclear material from Georgia at Dounreay.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): I thank the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) for his question.

The United Kingdom will shortly take delivery of approximately 5 kg of fresh and spent highly enriched uranium fuel that has been held at a civil research reactor in Tbilisi in Georgia. The Government's decision to accept the fuel was made in support of our policy on non-proliferation and our obligations to enhance security and safety.

The United Kingdom and United States experts who examined the Georgian reactor site concluded that the fuel was inadequately protected. Given that highly enriched uranium of this type is ideally suited for use in a nuclear weapon, it was essential that it was moved to a secure location. The fact that the United Kingdom is taking the material shows the Government's strong commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We shall be making a significant contribution to international security. Hon. Members will know that the 1996 summit in Moscow reaffirmed the commitment of the G8 countries to take action in support of that aim.

Other G8 countries are contributing to the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. The United States, for example, has taken 600 kg of highly enriched uranium from Kazakhstan. Russia has taken 173 kg of fissile material from Iraq since the Gulf war. France, Germany and Canada are involved in projects to convert stocks of excess plutonium from Russia's dismantled nuclear weapons into fuel for reactors.

The Government are determined to demonstrate that we, too, are committed to solving in a practical way the problems of nuclear proliferation. The uranium from Georgia will be held by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay. The vast majority will be usable immediately by the authority in its routine production of medical isotope targets, which are a vital component in both the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. This amount will permit the manufacture of an additional 5 million cancer treatments. The spent fuel—of which there is only 0.8 kg—will result, after reprocessing, in a small amount of intermediate-level radioactive waste. As Georgia has no other nuclear material and no facilities for storing waste, the United Kingdom is making an exception to its policy of long standing that waste generated by reprocessing foreign spent fuel should be returned to the country of origin.

The small quantity of waste will be retained in the United Kingdom. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, it will add about two drums of intermediate-level nuclear waste to the existing 14,000 drums at Dounreay. No decision has yet been made on exactly where it will be stored. The House will be advised on that. In accordance with International Atomic Energy Agency guidelines, which state that, for security reasons, movements of nuclear materials should not be made public in advance, we were under an obligation to keep confidential the fact that the material was to be moved from Georgia to the United Kingdom. We intended to inform Parliament of the details of the project on the day that the material arrived. Although, in accordance with the guidelines, we are not at this stage able to reveal publicly the date of the arrival of the highly enriched uranium in the United Kingdom, we shall, of course, notify Parliament on the date.

Mr. Maclennan: I thank the Minister for that reply. While I recognise the nature of the international guidelines to which he referred, with regard to intelligence about the date of movement, does he agree that it would have been better if the news of the agreement had come from the Government directly, not from the columns of the *New York Times*? Does he accept—I think that he clearly does—that if weapons-grade nuclear material is at risk of getting into the hands of dangerous people, there is a duty on the Government to seek to safeguard it by international collaborative action? While I recognise that the regulators have acknowledged the capability of Dounreay to handle the material safely and adapt it to benign use, including medical isotopes, can the Minister affirm again, in the light of the wild statements that have been made notably by the Scottish National party that Scotland is the nuclear dustbin of the world, that other countries are bearing a much heavier part of the international burden than Britain?

Will Her Majesty's Government seize this opportunity to initiate an open and wide international debate on the need to tackle the danger of unstable and unsuitable reactor systems in the states of the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe, which give rise to concern? In the light of the expertise and resources of the five permanent members of the Security Council, it must make sense to embrace the need to tackle the matter not only in the general terms of the non-proliferation agreement but in detailed terms of particular reactors.

Mr. Henderson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising those important issues. On the question of providing information, I shall not repeat what I said in my statement, but I agree that it would have been better had the matter been heard of first in the House. However, as he and the House will recognise, I cannot control what leaks are given to the *New York Times*.

On the other points of substance raised by the right hon. Gentleman, I very much agree that it is necessary to take international action to help the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union to deal with dangerous materials. The burden should be and is being shared internationally: the United States has made a contribution and so has Russia; France, Germany and Canada have indicated that they, too, are prepared to do so. It is important that if we say that we believe strongly in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, which this Government do, we are prepared to do what we need to do to help that process to be conducted safely and securely.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Setting aside whether the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) is suggesting that Mr. Alastair Campbell should extend his iron grip to the editorial staff of the *New York Times*,

does my hon. Friend agree that it is infinitely preferable that this potentially extremely dangerous material is in safe hands in this country where it can be properly dealt with than rolling around the world, with the possibility of rogue Governments, like those of Iraq and Libya, or terrorists getting hold of it?

Mr. Henderson: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend's point. That is also the view of the Georgian Government, who themselves want those dangerous substances to be dealt with safely and securely. They very much welcome the international effort, which includes on this occasion the contribution made by the British Government.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South–West Devon): Is not the Minister being complacent about the widespread concern that this serious matter has raised, not so much because of the substance of the matter, but because of the cloak-and-dagger way in which the deal was done and the underhand way in which it has come to light? Is the Minister aware that, although the Opposition will support any reasonable efforts to reduce nuclear proliferation, the way in which this secret deal has been struck is completely unacceptable? Does he recall that, when his party was in opposition, it promised that a future Labour Government would be committed to transparency and openness? Can he tell us what has happened to those promises now? Is that not another example of Labour saying one thing in opposition and doing exactly the reverse in government?

Can the Minister tell us, hand on heart, that if the news had not leaked in the *New York Times*, the Prime Minister was really intending to announce it, or has the leak necessitated a hasty rethink? Is it not the case that the Prime Minister was not prepared to release the information because he was afraid of the reaction on his own Back Benches? Will the Minister tell us how many other secret deals the Prime Minister has struck with President Clinton and what he hopes to get in return?

Has the Minister taken the trouble to ask the French and the Americans why they refused to take and process the nuclear waste that is now being transported to Scotland? How much more nuclear material has the Prime Minister agreed to take from the former Soviet Union? Can the Minister confirm that the Dounreay plant has both the licence and the technology to deal with this level of nuclear waste? Will he now, at last, tell the House the full terms of the agreement, so that we can make a judgment on its merits, as we should have been able to do at the outset? Finally, will he confirm that, in future, the Prime Minister will remember his pre-election promises and start to act in accordance with the principles of democratic and open government?

Mr. Henderson: I have heard many Opposition questions in 11 years in the House, but I have never heard one as misdirected as that one. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman wants the House to believe that he is soft on terrorism, but what he says is tantamount to that.

The previous Government would know, just as we now know, that there is a serious problem in dealing with these materials in countries such as Georgia. That is why an international agreement was made at the summit in Moscow in 1996, which the then Prime Minister attended, and at which he endorsed the principles that were agreed. What the Government are now doing is making a contribution as part of that international agreement.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that a draft parliamentary answer had already been prepared to give to the House once this matter could be announced to the House, and that those preparations had been made, but a time scale could not be put on it then, and it still cannot.

I am assured by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency that it is satisfied with the work that Dounreay will undertake. I am satisfied that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is perfectly capable of dealing with this substance effectively, and that view is supported in Dounreay.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): When did the request come, and who made it? Was the International Atomic Energy Agency consulted about the transaction? Was Euratom consulted under the European arrangements?

If it is a fact that the importation of nuclear material without the requirement that the waste be re-exported is to be Government policy, would it not be sensible to allow the House to debate it, as occurred in 1978 when, after the Parker commission, there was a full debate and a vote before the THORP project was established?

Mr. Henderson: The Government were originally approached by the American Government in autumn 1997, to seek a UK Government view on this international problem, which had to be dealt with. Some weeks ago, after considerable consultation had taken place with those involved, the Government decided that the project should be supported. I hope that I have made it clear that this is an exception to UK policy, because of the particular circumstances. The House is, of course, free to discuss the matter in a wider debate on these matters at any time, as appropriate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the Minister confirm that the Scotland Bill, if enacted, would provide that Members of the Scottish Parliament would not have a competence to discuss in Edinburgh transport arrangements of nuclear waste of this kind? Will he agree to place in the Library a note, setting out in precise terms the agreement struck with President Clinton, and the particulars in which the normal licensing regime has been relaxed?

Mr. Henderson: When I give the House the full information that I have committed myself to give, that information will be part of it.

Mr. Hogg: In the Library?

Mr. Henderson: Any detail that is not announced in a parliamentary answer or from the Dispatch Box will be placed in the Library.

The Scottish Parliament will have legislative and executive competence over the regulation of radioactive discharges—the functions that are currently carried out by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Nuclear energy is, however, a reserved matter, so the Scottish Parliament will have no direct responsibility for the operations at Dounreay, nor for regulating the storage of nuclear material at that site.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Would my hon. Friend care to comment on reports that this matter

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

involved a breach or waiver of some regulation, whereby nuclear material should be processed in the UK only if it is to be transported back to its country of origin? If there was such a breach or waiver of a regulation, does not that reinforce the case for seeking prior parliamentary approval or, at the very least, for a prior statement to be made in the House?

Mr. Henderson: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but two issues are involved. One is security. It would not be possible to return any processed products to Georgia because that would present a security risk. That was not an option. Therefore, if the United Kingdom was to contribute to the international effort, another means of dealing with the products had to be found. It was agreed that an exception should be made to our normal practice in this case. It was not possible to announce the decision in advance, because that would have given notice to potential terrorists in Georgia or elsewhere that there were dangerous materials on their doorstep that could be used to make devastating nuclear weapons. For those reasons, confidential measures had to be taken in advance.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth): Notwithstanding the Minister's remarks about Dounreay, he must be aware that long-standing concerns about safety standards at the facility are expressed frequently in Scotland. Not five days ago, an article appeared in *The Herald* in Scotland under the headline, "Dounreay's days as the nuclear dustbin to end", with the sub-headline, "Watchdog bans storage of irradiated waste without means of reprocessing". Given that the reprocessing plants at Dounreay have not been operational for the past 18 months and that, as far as we know, there is no current licence, the waste will not be reprocessed in the near future. In those circumstances, can the Minister explain why the secret deal was done?

Mr. Henderson: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but I must state emphatically that Dounreay is not a nuclear waste bin. Dounreay is a modern facility which processes by-products from other important areas. The hon. Lady will know that safety is always at the forefront of concern at Dounreay. Dounreay provides important technology for medical isotopes, which are an important constituent in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. That is just one important task that is undertaken at Dounreay. I think that the hon. Lady should be a little more objective in her consideration.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not the blunt truth that some hon. Members have gone over the top on this issue? It is a storm in a teacup: in terms of international waste disposal, we are talking about microscopic amounts of material. The hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), who led for the Opposition, acted thoroughly irresponsibly by suggesting that the transport of the material across Europe, by sea or by other means, should be advertised internationally before its arrival in the United Kingdom. That is the most irresponsible response to a statement that I have heard since the election last year.

Does not the question of international collaboration point to the need for the international community to get together and find a single international solution to the problem of nuclear waste disposal? We cannot continue to pick on different parts of the United Kingdom, as Nirex did in west Cumbria, or as was done some years ago at Dounreay, at the sites in Lincolnshire, or in Leicestershire or Bedfordshire about four years ago. I recall also the Billingham argument of about six years ago. We must abandon that approach and find a single international site that will allow us finally to resolve the problem of nuclear waste disposal.

Mr. Henderson: Hon. Members will know that my hon. Friend has considerable knowledge in this area, and that is much respected by the House. He understands the important considerations involved—as did the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, who asked the private notice question. Non-proliferation issues are key matters of international security, and there are ways of carrying through the policy safely and securely. It requires international action and international obligations, and we are playing a major part in that process.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): In respect of the Minister's last comments, it is important to find an international solution to the problem. I hope that the Foreign Office will take seriously the suggestion offered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, of further international discussion to clarify the position. On the subject of secrecy, the criticism is not that the details of the transfer were not made apparent, but that the principle of the transfer was not revealed. The Minister should address that issue.

On the specific issue of Dounreay, the Minister's statement makes it clear that not all the material can currently be processed at Dounreay. Can he give us an idea when that material can be processed? If there should be further undue delay, is there a possibility that it may be transferred elsewhere in the United Kingdom, such as to Sellafield?

Mr. Henderson: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, it would have been impossible to draw any distinction between the principle and the particular circumstances. All those involved who have any knowledge, and principally potential criminals and terrorists, would know the exact nature of the problem if a major debate were opened up on the issue. The hon. Gentleman will understand that.

Mr. Taylor: Rubbish

Mr. Henderson: It is not rubbish. As members of the previous Government will understand, that would become known in those circles in countries such as Georgia.

On the question whether the spent fuel will be reprocessed at Dounreay, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that that is the intention. I cannot say when that will take place, as that is an operational matter. On the question of storage, that requires further consideration.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): As I have told the House before, I was once upon a time a radiation biologist. I have also been a campaigner in an election in a constituency that was dominated by the atomic energy industry. That experience taught me that the industry

cannot, does not and will not accept the public's perception of the risk, and equally that the public will never accept the assurances that the industry gives about the measure of the risks. More openness is needed.

I am sure that the action that the Government have taken in accepting the material has decreased the risk to the world as a whole, at the expense, perhaps, of a slightly increased risk to the UK. I do not believe that the public will understand the trade-off that was necessary there.

I strongly urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the sort of international response suggested by some of my hon. Friends. We need a Kyoto-like conference between producers of waste, reprocessors of waste, Governments and environmentalists, in order to get a worldwide approach to the issue. At present, the British Government have the standing in the world to lead that effort.

Mr. Henderson: That was a knowledgeable contribution from my hon. Friend. I agree that there is a need for public education. The public have a right to know what is happening in their nation, on their behalf and, if they happen to live in Dounreay, on their doorstep. A wider debate on these matters is needed, and I support that.

I can tell my hon. Friend that there was a recognition in 1996 at the G8 summit in Moscow that international action was needed. Britain was represented at the time by the previous Government. This Government have made it clear to our partners in G8 and elsewhere that we are determined to follow a policy that is rigorous in pursuing non-proliferation. That means that there must be international action, collaboration and obligation.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): After Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and a series of nuclear accidents, some of which were made public and some of which were concealed in this country and abroad, it is not surprising that the public are sceptical about the claims of the nuclear industry concerning their own safety.

I welcome the statement by my hon. Friend this afternoon, but will he endorse the various comments that we have heard about the need for wide public debate about the future of nuclear waste disposal, and the need for an international agreement to solve a growing international problem? Can he give us an assurance that the shipment from Georgia is a one-off, without prejudice to any future shipments? Does it provide a precedent for the future?

Mr. Henderson: I have made it clear in response to other questions that there is an international obligation, which my hon. Friend mentioned and to which the Government are committed. There is a need for international action. I agree that there should be as wide a debate as possible on these matters, and the wider that debate, the more it will help people to recognise the important obligations that we all have, and the important work that is carried out by those in Dounreay on behalf of us all.

Points of Order

3.59 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance on the Prime Minister's failure to make a statement on his recent visit to the middle east? When the Foreign Secretary similarly failed to make a statement a short while ago, you will recall that he sought to justify that on the basis that there had been no change of policy. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) raised a point of order on that occasion and observed that there was no basis for that assertion, you robustly agreed with him, Madam Speaker.

Is it not the case that, on all precedent, after a visit of such importance, the Prime Minister should come to the House to account to it for the outcome of that visit? Is it not the case also that his failure to do so, particularly after the copious press briefing that has taken place, illustrates yet again the Prime Minister's utter contempt for Parliament?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have a hunch—usually I do not work on hunches—that there will be several points of order on this matter. I shall take them one after another and then deal with them all at the same time.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I support my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) by making a further suggestion. It is clearly a problem that the House is not having Ministers before it to account for their overseas visits. One must assume that that is deliberate Government policy. One way in which you could deal with the problem, Madam Speaker, is to convene a Speaker's Conference, so that we might determine the criteria that should govern the making of statements to the House.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker. It is on the same subject. It was clear that the Prime Minister wanted to get some soundbites across on the middle east peace process today. You will have noticed that three questions were asked by Labour Members. Two of them were laboriously read out and the third was slightly more spontaneous. Those questions enabled the Prime Minister to make some comments on the middle east peace process. Do you not agree that the House deserves a full and proper statement rather than soundbites and detailed press briefings?

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker. May I support the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) in his wish that there had been a statement, as if there had been such a statement, it would have enabled the House to bestow on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the praise that is appropriate for his superb statesmanship?

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker. In the light of everything that you

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

have already heard, could you give an idea whether, if I and other colleagues tabled a private notice question on this matter for tomorrow, that PNQ would be accepted, so as to help the Prime Minister's office?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not a fact that over the years that you have been in the Chair as Speaker, and before that as Deputy Speaker, there have been many occasions when hon. Members such as myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), when sitting on Opposition Benches, have demanded that the Prime Minister of the day, the Tory Prime Minister, make a statement about this, that and the other? We were flattened by the Tory Government and told to mind our own business.

The truth is that there is a bout of hypocrisy on this matter on the Tory Benches. If there had been a statement, I do not think that there is any doubt what the outcome would have been. If I had been Prime Minister, I would have had a statement. I would have allowed hon. Members to congratulate me on walking on water. All that my right hon. Friend has done is to save some parliamentary time, to get the Northern Ireland peace agreement through the House, for which he had some responsibility as well. He could have had a statement about Northern Ireland. The truth is that the Tory representatives are full of hypocrisy. It is time that they went into the Library and checked the record.

Madam Speaker: The House is well aware that it is for Ministers and not for the Speaker to determine whether a statement should be made. Of course, major developments in Government policy should always be reported to the House first, and there will be many occasions when it will be appropriate for Ministers to make statements following a visit overseas. In the latter case, it is for the Minister to decide whether, in all the circumstances, a statement is appropriate.

I do not believe that a precedent has been created by not making a statement today. On this occasion, the Prime Minister decided not to make a statement, and he was entitled to take that decision. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) asked me to call a Speaker's Conference. The Speaker does not call such a conference: it is the Prime Minister who does that. I hope that the House is now properly informed on that procedure. I was also asked about a private notice question. I do not give hostages to fortune. Hon. Members should try me out.

BILL PRESENTED

Registered Establishments (Scotland)

Dr. Lynda Clark, supported by Mrs. Rosemary McKenna, Mr. Desmond Browne, Mr. David Stewart, Mr. Frank Roy, Miss Anne Begg, Ms Sandra Osborne, Mr. James Wallace, Mrs. Ray Michie, Mr. Douglas Alexander, Mr. Russell Brown and Mr. John Home Robertson, presented a Bill to add to the classes of establishment which require to be registered under section 61 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April, and to be printed [Bill 176].

Children's Nurseries (Safety)

4.5 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Children Act 1989 to improve the registration and inspection procedures in nurseries by introducing stricter safety guidelines for registration and more frequent and unannounced inspections.

I am grateful to the House for giving me the opportunity to highlight the issue of child care in pre-school nurseries. An increasing number of pre-school children are attending day nurseries as the Government provide more places. It is estimated that there are currently 5,700 such establishments.

I was elected to improve education and increase access to nursery care and education. The advantages of nursery provision in terms of improved education and in allowing parents to return to work have been well documented, and I welcome the Green Paper proposals. However, parents must feel confident about the care that their children will receive, especially when it is often the first time that parent and child are separated.

There is growing concern that, with the rapid expansion of early-days care, safety is being compromised in the rush to provide places. A recent BBC "Panorama" documentary entitled "Nursery Care on the Cheap" demonstrated some of the worst cases of failure of care. Inadequate supervision and poor facilities are putting children's lives in danger. My constituent Catriona Rae experienced the greatest of tragedies when on 8 July 1997 her 20-month-old son Alex drowned in a 20 ft by 10 ft ornamental fish pond at the Hilltop Bunnies nursery in Belmont, Lancashire. On the day that her son died, only one qualified member of staff was present instead of the legally required three, and one of the staff who was registered with social services had never worked at the nursery.

While the other children were playing, Alex wandered into an area of the nursery that was neither licensed nor fenced off and he was found dead in 8 in of water in the tarpaulin that covered the pond. He had gone unnoticed for at least 10 minutes. I have learned of other examples of nurseries throughout the country in which the standard of care and supervision has been shockingly deficient.

Part X of the Children Act 1989 sets out the framework for the registration and inspection of day nurseries and entrusts local authorities with carrying out those procedures. Guidance is offered to authorities in Department of Health circulars. That Department was responsible for administering the Children Act, but that responsibility was recently transferred to the Department for Education and Employment, as day nurseries are now being considered within the remit of early-years education.

In Department of Health circular LAC (93), the previous Government, in an attempt to increase the number of places in day nurseries, suggested that the guidelines governing registration should be relaxed. The circular acknowledges:

"Guidance issued by the Department does not prescribe legally required standards for registration . . . registration should be granted unless a local authority is satisfied that the applicant is not fit to look after children."

The circular permits nurseries to open after an initial inspection and sets a time limit for them to make any necessary changes before further action is taken, even if those nurseries are unsafe when they first accept children.

The circular was dated January 1993, and Alex Rae died in July 1997. It is evident from that that the current legislation is insufficient. Local authorities may choose to interpret the guidelines as they see fit, and the issuing of a circular can alter the entire interpretation of the Act.

The Bill would change the situation. I should like to see a system of national registration and qualification that is administered uniformly throughout all local authorities. Surely there should be national standards, with inspectors trained by the Health and Safety Executive.

Social services departments should have to follow legally binding procedures, with an initial inspection containing specific safety checks. All that must be adhered to before a nursery is allowed to open. Records should be published of all initial inspections, and registration should be granted only if the local authority is completely satisfied that every guideline has been followed.

The penalties for breach of the regulations should be increased. The Hilltop Bunnies nursery was fined just £4,000 for a breach of regulations. If the penalties were increased, it would encourage nurseries to adhere to safety regulations.

The Bill seeks to amend the system of inspection for nurseries. Surprisingly, day nurseries are not subject to the same number of inspections each year as facilities for other vulnerable people such as the mentally handicapped or the elderly. Social services departments are required to inspect nurseries only annually, and notice must be given beforehand. That gives nurseries time to prepare for the inspection which, inevitably, results in an inaccurate picture of the everyday running of the nursery. Nurseries have been known to draft in extra staff for those occasions, to meet the minimum staff-child ratios, and specific care is often taken to remove hazardous objects that might otherwise remain.

The Bill proposes to increase the minimum number of inspections to two in order to bring it into line with other caring establishments. After all, why should the safety of a child be less valued than that of a vulnerable adult? Social services departments should be required to visit the nurseries without prior warning, which would increase the incentive for nurseries to follow guidelines and to maintain the highest standards throughout the year.

The Bill proposes to make a few minor changes to the existing legislation, yet it would immediately ensure that children were safer in day care. I am grateful to the 112 hon. Members who have offered their support to early-day motion 848, which recognises the need for a fundamental review of the legislation in the light of the needless death of Alex Rae.

Since I tabled the Bill, the Government have announced the publication of a consultation document entitled, "Early Education and Day Care", which looks at the whole issue of child care in pre-school settings. I welcome that initiative and will be looking carefully at the proposals. I hope that my Bill will pave the way to improving safety in children's nurseries and will ensure that at least something positive comes from the tragic and needless death of my constituent, Alex Rae.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Mr. Bill Olner, Mr. Frank Cook, Mrs. Llin Golding, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mrs. Helen Brinton, Ms Christine Russell, Ms Candy Atherton, Mrs. Linda Gilroy, Mr. Laurence Robertson, Mr. David Amess and Mr. David Chaytor.

CHILDREN'S NURSERIES (SAFETY)

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Children Act 1989 to improve the registration and inspection procedures in nurseries by introducing stricter safety guidelines for registration and more frequent and unannounced inspections: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 177].

Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill (Programme)

4.13 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill:

TIMING OF PROCEEDINGS

1.—(1) Proceedings on the bill shall be completed at the sitting on Wednesday 22nd April.

(2) Proceedings on Second Reading shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement of proceedings on this motion.

(3) Remaining proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion seven hours after the commencement of proceedings on this motion.

(4) Standing Order 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at the sitting on 22nd April.

2.—(1) When the Bill has been read a second time—

(a) it shall, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put,

(b) proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed while the Question is put, in accordance with Standing Order No. 52(1) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills), on any financial resolution relating to the Bill; and

(c) on the conclusion of proceedings on any financial resolution relating to the Bill, proceedings on the Bill shall be resumed and the Speaker shall leave the chair whether or not notice of an instruction has been given.

(2) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question; and if he reports the Bill with Amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

QUESTIONS TO BE PUT

3.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown; and

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion for a new Clause or Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If two or more Questions would fall to be put by the Chairman under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions.

MISCELLANEOUS

4. If at the sitting on 22nd April—

(a) a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over to Seven o'clock, and

(b) proceedings on the Bill have begun before that time,

the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings in accordance with paragraph 1 shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

5.—(1) No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

(2) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment.

6. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

7.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced; and Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(2) If at the sitting on 22nd April the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraph 1, no notice shall be required of a Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have acknowledged that, although the agreement that was reached on Good Friday is not an end in itself, it is extremely important, because it represents the best opportunity for a generation to achieve a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. That is why this specific motion is before us.

When the agreement was reached, it was welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is extremely important that we retain an all-party approach to this issue, which is one reason why I am so pleased that the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who represents the Liberal Democrats, have agreed to sign the programme motion.

At the time of the agreement, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), the Conservative party leader, said:

"This Agreement is perhaps the best opportunity that we shall ever have to secure a new beginning for Northern Ireland."

The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said:

"We have got an agreement which stretched far wider across Northern Ireland than we could possibly have imagined".

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who cannot be here because of other commitments, said:

"We have laid the foundation for a healthy, vibrant democracy to replace the stagnation of the last three decades."

That was why, following the widely welcomed statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on Monday, I announced a change of business to take this Bill through all its stages today.

On Monday, the Secretary of State outlined the basis of the agreement, and indicated the various parts of it that would require action by the House. Today, the House has its first opportunity to play its part in facilitating the agreement. Later tonight, the House will be asked to approve orders for the provision of the referendum and for the winding up of the forum, but first we ask the House to take all stages of the Bill today. I know that that is unusual, but, as hon. Members will know, it is not unprecedented.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), will deal in detail with the merits of the Bill when he opens the

Second Reading debate shortly. The longer we spend debating the programme motion, the less time we will have to consider the Bill in detail. I want to say simply why it is appropriate that the House should give the Bill priority and treat it in this unusual way, taking all stages in one day.

As I say, that is not unprecedented. The House can respond to emergencies. Only two weeks ago, we considered the Criminal Procedure (Intermediate Diets) (Scotland) Bill, but, of course, this is a much bigger Bill and I cannot rely just on precedent. The House has a responsibility to act swiftly.

On Monday, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said:

"There may be an agreement on paper . . . but it is with the hearts and minds of the people . . . that the challenge will lie."—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 490.]

The House clearly cannot legislate for hearts and minds, but it does have a responsibility to do everything it can and to move as quickly as possible to facilitate the delivery of the agreement, and the opportunities in it for the people who are most affected to express their views not only in the referendum but in the elections.

The timetable for the referendum and elections is tight, but that timetable was decided by the agreement on Good Friday, and we in the House must do all we can to maintain the momentum. That is the will of the House, and I hope that we can proceed by general agreement.

I acknowledge that there is some concern on the part of some Members; I know that the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has already expressed his. Of course he is right to say that we do not usually take Bills in this way, but these are not usual circumstances, and, as the Secretary of State said on Monday, this is a unique agreement, born of a unique set of negotiations and circumstances. The House has a responsibility to act quickly, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk and others who have given their support for dealing with the matter in this way.

4.19 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): On Monday, I was happy to express the Opposition's total support for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the statement she made. Later that day, I was also happy to give our support to this unusual way of dealing with unprecedented need. I reaffirm that support.

4.20 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): This is indeed an unusual procedure, and I am against it. I am against asking this House to enact an important piece of legislation in a constrained and hurried way. I am not against the agreement. I accept that there are many unpalatable things about it, but I also accept the view that it must be taken in the broad, looking at the alternatives. Viewed in that way, I support the agreement. I will also support such legislation as may be necessary to give expression to the agreement—but I am opposed to this timetable motion.

I want to do two things—first, to draw attention to the nature of the timetable motion; secondly, to emphasise that we are depriving ourselves of the ability properly to address a number of questions that need to be asked. The timetable motion gives us, in effect, four hours to debate Second Reading. That is simply not sufficient for such a Bill.

Much worse, the House will then go straight into Committee. Usually, there is a gap between Second Reading and Committee stage, which enables hon. Members to consider what has been said on Second Reading and to receive representations from outside the House on the Bill's clauses. We are about to deprive ourselves of that time for reflection.

Furthermore, we are depriving our constituents and the wider community of the ability to influence the thinking of hon. Members on the terms of the Bill. More than that, we are actually limiting the time spent in Committee. Usually, the House could spend as much time as it wished in Committee, subject to timetable motions, yet today we are being asked to constrain the House and to deal with all the procedures on the Bill within seven hours. That is thoroughly bad practice.

The Report stage, which usually exists when dealing with an important Bill, has been removed from the procedure on this Bill, so the House will not have the opportunity to amend the Bill if it be amended in Committee. We will have put that outside our ability. Again, that is thoroughly undesirable.

Perhaps right hon. and hon. Members will say that, if there are any glaring anomalies, they can be dealt with in the other place. That is an illusion. The House knows that those on the Government Front Bench will be extremely reluctant to bring the Bill back to the House with Lords amendments, so they will do their utmost to prevent any amendments from being made there, however respectable the arguments for them may be. That is why I am against the process.

In a sense, I am making a general argument, but it is also a particular argument relating to the Bill. I will not go into the pros and cons of the Bill's contents, because that is a matter for Second Reading. However, it is right to identify one or two questions. We should at least ask ourselves whether it is right effectively to deprive the House of the ability to amend.

I do not believe that the Bill is self-evidently perfect, and that it should proceed into law as it stands. I want to highlight—I shall do no more than that—some aspects. First, there is the term for which the assembly will be appointed. Nothing in the Bill time-limits the assembly. It is true that it may be limited by function, but it is not limited by time. In a sense, we could be creating a long assembly, in the way that our predecessors created the Long Parliament. That is a matter for debate. Then there is the question whether there should be an amendment.

Secondly, what about vacancies? The Secretary of State has reserved to herself the ability to determine how vacancies shall be filled, whether they shall be made up by the electoral process or by appointment. True, that is subject to the affirmative procedure, but surely it is the kind of thing on which the House may wish to express an opinion and then perhaps amend the Bill.

Thirdly, we know from the Bill that the procedures of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975, which govern membership of this House, are being applied with some relatively minor modifications to the assembly. It is for question whether it is right to import that Act to the

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

assembly. Again, it is a matter which needs to be debated in some detail, so that the House can, if necessary, amend the Bill.

Fourthly, the Secretary of State has in the schedule reserved to herself the right to determine what salary, if any, Members of the Assembly should be paid. That money comes out of public funds, and I believe that the House should have the opportunity to determine those sums, and to specify them in the Bill. However, we are effectively depriving ourselves of that ability.

Finally, and perhaps most important, I must mention the appointment of the Presiding Officer and his or her deputy. The Secretary of State has reserved to herself in the schedule the power in the first instance to appoint the Presiding Officer and the deputy. It is for argument whether the House might wish to include in the Bill a provision that Presiding Officers and deputies who are associated with organisations that have not delivered on their commitments are ineligible to serve as such officers.

I am not saying that the points I have made are right or wrong; I am merely saying that there are serious issues that ought to be debated in the House, that we should have the opportunity to debate them in the usual way and then amend the Bill.

I know that the big battalions are against me. When I see cross-party support for a measure, I know that my chances of making any progress, in any sense probably, are slight. It is not my intention to detain the House, because I know that this time is being taken from that allowed for the substantive debate. I remind the House that the same applies to the time taken for Divisions, so if anyone decides to dissent by voting, the time taken reduces that available for debate.

For general and particular reasons, we should not accept the motion. I hope that hon. Members who reflect on parliamentary procedure and who feel that I am right will protest this process, even if they feel that they can only do so privately.

4.27 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I may have reached a different conclusion from the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) as to the nature, if not the desirability, of the agreement, but I do not dispute the logic of his remarks about the procedure on which the House is about to embark. Indeed, it is grossly unfair that we will be punished for objecting. The time we take to put down a marker about the House's departure from standard procedure is to be taken out of the time that we have to debate the Bill as a whole. In other words, the longer we object, the worse things become. That cannot be right.

I make it clear that my colleagues and I believe that the procedure in question is wholly unacceptable, and it is unacceptable for the very reason that the Leader of the House told us we should accept it. She said that these are exceptional circumstances, and that this is a very important matter. Of course it is, and it is for that very reason that we should be taking the utmost care—we are dealing with a matter of the utmost importance and moment.

The Order Paper states that a number of amendments have been tabled. They are all intelligent, studied and considered. Indeed, amendments are still being tabled, as many of us did not know until late last night that the business was to be conducted today. Some of us did not see the Bill until this morning, so we did not have the opportunity to table amendments until then. We would have welcomed more time to do that, but the Government ram stam to get the business through the House with the same dilution of democracy that is depicted in the agreement. It does no service to the House or the people of Northern Ireland that such important business should be dealt with in such a disgraceful manner.

If the Government wanted to ensure that the measure went through, but also wanted to protect the rights of hon. Members to table considered amendments, they could have allowed the business to continue through the night if necessary. Although we do not enjoy staying up all night, many of us would have been prepared to do so rather than allow the Bill to go through with many of our amendments not being called. Let us be clear that some amendments will be passed over because of the guillotine, and that cannot be good for democracy or the House of Commons.

Like the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, I have done my arithmetic. It is clear that there is little chance of the House reversing the Government's decision. However, the Government should think again, as their message is very clear to the people of Northern Ireland: "It does not matter what rules and procedures have been standard practice in the past, or whatever the people of Northern Ireland may think. We are pushing this through, come what may."

4.30 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The Liberal Democrats support the motion, and want to get on to the substance of the Bill. The people of Northern Ireland, and indeed the United Kingdom, want progress to be made in Northern Ireland. I hope that, by the end of today, progress will have been made.

4.31 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Sometimes progress can mean two steps forward and three steps back. I am not altogether surprised by the guillotine motion. There was a time when Opposition parties automatically voted against guillotine motions, so that they would have more time to examine Government legislation. However, I suspect that those on the Conservative Front Bench have it in mind that they have a debt to pay.

I recall that there was a guillotine on the legislation in respect of the last Northern Ireland assembly, and that it was carried only when the Opposition of the day decided not to vote against it. We knew that the 1982 assembly would fall because it was based on false foundations, and I regret that today we are moving in the same direction.

On Saturday, a woman said to me, "Were you at the wake last night?" I looked at her in amazement for a moment, and she said, "It is the death of democracy." The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) spoke about wanting to move on to examine the legislation, but there is not enough time to do so. I hope that we are not slipping into carelessness knowing that, traditionally, when the House panics into a cross-party agreement, ultimately we reap the whirlwind and have to rectify it.

4.33 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I shall be brief. The contents of the Bill are of profound importance to the people of Northern Ireland. Some feel that the agreement is deeply divisive, but even those who support it should avoid at all costs giving the people of Northern Ireland the impression that the legislation is being conducted in an oppressive, coercive and undemocratic manner.

The suggestion that a measure of such profound constitutional importance should be hustled through the House unconsidered or ill considered because of the lack of time will simply deepen the suspicions of the people whom this legislation will most deeply affect that they are no longer considered first-class citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but may be dealt with in the same way as those outside the law.

All hon. Members, regardless of their feelings about the benefits or the detriments of the Bill, should consider carefully that, if democracy and the reputation of the House are to be served, and if the agreement and the measures that are required to implement it are to be a success, democracy and justice must not only be done, but, in accordance with the best practice of the House, be manifestly seen to be done.

4.35 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I support the motion. My inclination is always to oppose a guillotine, so I understand the arguments of hon. Members from the Conservative and other parties that there is not sufficient time—I have sympathy with that point of view.

We are facing arguments, however, from those who have had the opportunity over these past two long years to take part in every stage of framing the agreement and to debate in depth every word and phrase in that agreement. For reasons known to themselves—they are entitled to their views—they did not avail themselves of that opportunity. It is remarkable that not one of the Unionist Members arrayed before us today took part in the final decisions, or even the earlier decisions, on the Bill.

Whatever the merits of the guillotine, there can be no justification for opposing it on the ground that it will not give the people of the north of Ireland and their representatives the opportunity to make their case. That opportunity existed for two years. Some refused to take it, and shirked it, whereas others faced up to their responsibilities. For that reason, on behalf of my party, I support the guillotine motion.

4.37 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): It is a pity that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) did not stick to the facts. I was at the talks on the condition that they would not proceed until the arsenal of murder weapons was surrendered—that commitment was given to me in Downing street again and again by the Prime Minister of the day. I was also told that, if only some arms were given up, those parties invoived would have to pay over every month—if they did not, they would be put out of the talks. That was the basis on which the talks were to take place.

When my party went to the country, we made it clear that if decommissioning did not occur—I am talking about decommissioning of all arms used by terrorists, whether they be on one side of the fence or the other—and there was an attempt to bring IRA-Sinn Fein to the table my party would not be present. We fought the election on that manifesto. We are not like some parties in the House that tell the electorate something and then go back on it—we made our position perfectly clear.

It is ironic that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh should say that we should have joined the talks, as I received a letter from the Secretary of State saying, without any explanation, that my party would not be allowed into the talks even when the final decision was to be taken.

The House can go ahead and ram these measures through. I have seen that happen before. I remember the Prime Minister of the day, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), telling me that he had made peace when he did away with Stormont. I said to him, "You have had a Christmas party, but you will not have one any longer," and we know what happened.

The House is supposed to be democratic, and even those who are opposed to the legislation should be allowed to discuss it with the same amount of time that is given to any other part of the United Kingdom, especially when so many issues are at stake. Where are the friends of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, who sat in the talks until the end, and were hailed as statesmen? Where is the leader of the Official Unionist party, his deputy or his chief security man? Why are they not here to defend their position? We saw how they ran out of the forum on Friday, and were not prepared to take part in debate.

Those who cannot debate an issue and run away need not hurl insults at those who bring up issues that they do not like to be brought up. It is mean and contemptible that representatives of Northern Ireland are not permitted to discuss under the usual circumstances a matter that has divided and polarised Northern Ireland more than any other. Hon. Members can close their eyes and ears, but, at the end of the day, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, the people of Northern Ireland will have to reap the whirlwind of their sowing.

4.41 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). This business has been going on for an awfully long time—I am thinking particularly of the negotiations and discussions of the past two years—and an agreement was reached on Good Friday this year. That agreement lightened the hearts of everyone, both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Stott: I heard what the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) said earlier.

We have gone through this process for a long time, and we now have an agreement between the Irish and British Governments and the leadership of the Unionist party and the Social Democratic and Labour party about how to move forward. I never thought that that would happen in my lifetime, having spent so much time in Northern Ireland in the bad days.

[Mr. Stott]

We can debate the agreement on Second Reading, but we must allow my Government to facilitate it through the House so that we can get to the stage of a referendum. The hon. and learned Member for North Down says that it is unacceptable. It is all right for him to sit there—I see that he has crossed the Floor from where he sat before—and say that the agreement is not acceptable, but we shall see whether it is accepted in the referendum by people in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

If I were a gambling man, which I am not—my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh is, and always has been—I would bet that this agreement, which was discussed and painfully negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, will be accepted by the people of Northern Ireland.

4.44 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I will be brief. Obviously, the shorter the time spent on this motion, the longer there will be to discuss Second Reading. I will leave those points that should be dealt with on Second Reading to the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), who is to reply later.

I will pick up on one or two of the contributions made to the debate, in particular that of the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who picked up on my words that this was an unusual process. It is indeed, but taking all the stages of a Bill in one day is not unprecedented. He has voted for such procedures on some occasions, so he is not justified in suddenly objecting today simply because we are doing so.

The Bill is not complex, and the issues contained in it, which relate to the provision of elections, were the subject of much discussion in the talks process before Good Friday—one reason why we can make good progress today, I hope. I will not go in detail into the points that the right hon. and learned Gentleman raised, because my hon. Friend can deal with them on Second Reading. If the House took the right hon. and learned Gentleman's advice and delayed discussions of the Bill, he would have to think carefully about the consequences of the delay. I do not think that that would be an attractive proposition.

Mr. Hogg: I have no objection to proceeding with Second Reading today in the ordinary way. The right hon. Lady could bring the Bill back to the House for the Committee stage next week if she wanted. Why is she not prepared to do so, and to allow a seven-day gap between Second Reading and Committee?

Mrs. Taylor: There is sufficient agreement, and there has been sufficient discussion of the Bill during the talks process, for us to proceed as we intend, and I am glad that the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is nodding his head in agreement.

As regards the comments made by some hon. Gentlemen—

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Did the right hon. Lady say a few moments ago that there had been sufficient discussion of the Bill during the talks over the agreement? Was the text of the Bill available there? If so, we Ulster Unionists were not aware of it.

Mrs. Taylor: I think that the hon. Gentleman misheard me. I said that the issues had been discussed. The House is being asked to facilitate elections that, when the referendum is held, I believe the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland will say they want to take place. Some of the comments made about the Bill, especially from the Bench opposite, were really made not in objection to the programme motion, but to the fact that we have the Bill and the agreement at all. There is no way in which we can hope to satisfy—or would want to satisfy—downright opponents of the agreement.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is it not correct that any issues discussed within the talks were confidential and not available to the public? The great distinction between what took place in those talks and what takes place here is the public nature of debate in the House.

Mrs. Taylor: The agreement was published, and there was a full statement on it in the House on Monday, when those hon. Members who were present could question the Secretary of State and took that opportunity. On that aspect, it is important to remember, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said, that, in two long years, Members opposite have had every chance to take part in the discussions and have not done so. On that basis and against that background, I do not think that we should be put off making progress today.

Again, I thank the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), for the views that they expressed. Clearly, while the House cannot itself solve the problems of Northern Ireland, it can and should do all it can to ensure that the hope that was generated by the agreement on Good Friday is turned into real achievement. The motion and the Bill will be a step in the right direction.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 350, Noes 11.

Division No. 251] **[4.49 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*	Battle, John
Ainger, Nick	Bayley, Hugh
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Beard, Nigel
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Alexander, Douglas	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Allan, Richard	Bennett, Andrew F
Allen, Graham	Benton, Joe
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael	Bercow, John
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Berry, Roger
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*	Best, Harold
Arbuthnot, James	Betts, Clive
Armstrong, Ms Hilary	Blackman, Liz
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Atherton, Ms Candy	Blunt, Crispin
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Body, Sir Richard
Austin, John	Boswell, Tim
Baker, Norman	Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Ballard, Mrs Jackie	Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Barnes, Harry	Bradshaw, Ben
Barron, Kevin	Brady, Graham

Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dawson, Hilton
Day, Stephen
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fallon, Michael
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Horne Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McGrady, Eddie
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Malins, Humfrey
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Ottaway, Richard
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hunter, Andrew
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Rev. Ian Paisley and
Mr. William Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill:

TIMING OF PROCEEDINGS

1.—(1) Proceedings on the bill shall be completed at the sitting on Wednesday 22nd April.

(2) Proceedings on Second Reading shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement of proceedings on this motion.

(3) Remaining proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion seven hours after the commencement of proceedings on this motion.

(4) Standing Order 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at the sitting on 22nd April.

2.—(1) When the Bill has been read a second time—

(a) it shall, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put,

(b) proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed while the Question is put, in accordance with Standing Order No. 52(1) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills), on any financial resolution relating to the Bill; and

(c) on the conclusion of proceedings on any financial resolution relating to the Bill, proceedings on the Bill shall be resumed and the Speaker shall leave the chair whether or not notice of an instruction has been given.

(2) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question; and if he reports the Bill with Amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

QUESTIONS TO BE PUT

3.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown; and

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion for a new Clause or Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If two or more Questions would fall to be put by the Chairman under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions.

MISCELLANEOUS

4. If at the sitting on 22nd April—

(a) a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over to Seven o'clock, and

(b) proceedings on the Bill have begun before that time,

the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings in accordance with paragraph 1 shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

5.—(1) No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

(2) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment.

6. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

7.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced; and Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(2) If at the sitting on 22nd April the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraph 1, no notice shall be required of a Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.2 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and, on Monday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave the House some details of the overall settlement reached in Castle buildings on Good Friday. Like them, I pay tribute to all those involved, especially the leaders of the political parties and the talks delegates, who spent more than two years arriving at the agreement that was forged and settled just over a week ago. Underpinning the settlement is the principle of consent, and the triple lock of the parties, Parliament and the people is an essential element in the agreement.

Later tonight, we shall consider two orders: the first provides for a referendum on 22 May; the second brings the life of the Northern Ireland forum to an end after it meets for the last time on Friday. The Bill provides for elections to a New Northern Ireland Assembly to be held on 25 June—subject, of course, to a yes vote in the referendum the month before.

We need the Bill now so that the Northern Ireland parties can prepare for the elections in June and engage in the forthcoming referendum campaign. I do not want to go into the details of the previous debate, other than to say that this is only one of two Bills that will deal with the settlement and the agreement.

If on 22 May the people, as I hope, wish and pray they do, say yes to the agreement, the House will be able to consider a much larger Bill—a major constitutional Bill—to implement the entire settlement. The Bill will make necessary legal provision for the setting up of the north-south ministerial council. It will deal with human rights and equality matters. It will deal with the transfer of all six Northern Ireland Departments to the new Administration. It will, in effect—

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Murphy: Of course.

Mr. Robinson: Will the Minister be helpful by giving the House an assurance that there will be no guillotine whatever when that occurs?

Mr. Murphy: It is not my business to speak on behalf of the Leader of the House, but I can say that in recent months the House has met through the night a number of times and given detailed scrutiny to the Welsh and Scottish Bills. I have not the slightest doubt that every opportunity will be given to hon. Members here and the other place to deal effectively and properly with what will be a major constitutional Bill, with similar status to those relating to Wales and Scotland.

Dr. Godman: These are early days and I am trying to be helpful, but if, as I sincerely hope, we get a yes vote on 22 May, will the Secretary of State seriously consider commissioning an international architectural competition for the design of the new assembly building? *[Laughter.]* I do not know why there is laughter from the Opposition Benches. I remind my hon. Friend that an international competition is now taking place for the design of a Scottish Parliament and that President Clinton and Congress may well offer to contribute to the building of a new Parliament in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Murphy: That is a very interesting idea. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was shadow Heritage Secretary she took a great interest in architectural matters, but I must tell my hon. Friend that the matter will be for the assembly to decide. I know from experience in Wales that these are not easy matters to consider, and I believe that that is a matter for the assembly to consider, when it is set up.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I have read the document, and it tells me that the Secretary of State says where and when the assembly will meet—and yet the hon. Gentleman now tells us that we shall have a choice in the meeting.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman should realise that the Bill sets up what we describe as the shadow assembly. If there is an election on 25 June, as a result of a positive vote in the referendum, of course a place must be found immediately for the assembly to meet to conduct its initial business. That is a matter for the Secretary of State, initially, to decide, but the ultimate home of the assembly must be a matter for the assembly itself—as it will be in other parts of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) asked me whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would institute a competition among architects. I can give an absolute assurance that she will not.

The Bill refers to what has been termed strand 1 of the talks and of the settlement, but the agreement is a package, covering relations north and south, relations east and west and other matters. Even without the special circumstances of Northern Ireland, of which we are all aware, the Bill would be in line with the Government's policy on devolution.

It is right and proper that power comes closer to the people of Northern Ireland, in any event; it is right that the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland is addressed, in any event; but it has a special significance in Northern Ireland because I believe the assembly will be a vehicle for change and for reconciliation, as Members of the Assembly will need to work together for the benefit of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

For example, positions of executive authority and chairmanships and memberships of committees will be proportional and based on the number of seats that parties win in the election. Key decisions will be taken on a cross-community basis with the need for significant support from both Unionist and nationalist members elected to the body. The most important appointments of

[Mr. Murphy]

the Presiding Officer, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will have to be made precisely through that method.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Can the hon. Gentleman define what constitutes a key decision?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, that is part of the agreement. A key decision will be defined by a substantial minority of Members in the Assembly, triggering the mechanism by which the assembly will examine major decisions such as the election of the Presiding Officer and the Budget. The agreement outlines in some detail a facility, which is also in the major constitutional Bill, that refers precisely to the way in which those key decisions are defined.

The Bill provides for a shadow assembly that will have to make key appointments, draw up Standing Orders and deal with the smooth transfer of power to the new institutions. The shadow Minister will be consulted by my right hon. Friend and my other ministerial colleagues in the next few months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The Minister has now turned to the shadow assembly. I am sure that he knows that the Bill does not explain how long that assembly will exist and the circumstances in which it will cease to exist. Can the hon. Gentleman inform the House whether the assembly's existence is time limited and what is the mechanism for bringing it to an end?

Mr. Murphy: The assembly, in terms of membership, will be the same when it has transferred to it the major functions of the Northern Ireland Departments that are now in the hands of my right hon. Friend and other Northern Ireland Ministers. The functions of the assembly will change as a result of the major constitutional Bill that the House must consider in some months. This Bill provides for the elections to the assembly and the functions and preparatory work for establishing the assembly.

Mr. Hogg: As I understand it, the Minister is saying that this body, set up initially as a shadow assembly, will become a full assembly in due course. That means that we must focus on the term of election of individual Members. Does the Minister expect that Members elected to the shadow assembly will become Members of the full assembly? Does he expect that there will be an election in the fairly near future when the shadow assembly will become the full assembly?

Mr. Murphy: No. There is precedent in our system of government to allow for that. Hon. Members may recall what happened—it happened to me 20-odd years ago—when local government in England and Wales was reorganised in 1973. Those who were elected served on shadow local authorities for one year and then assumed the full functions on 1 April 1974. Precisely the same thing will occur in this instance. A four-year term is envisaged in the agreement, but the major constitutional Bill will firm up those provisions.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): The agreement appears to provide that one function of the shadow assembly will be to agree the terms and functions of the north-south ministerial council and the extent of the powers and remit of the cross-border implementing bodies. Is there a time limit within which the shadow assembly must make those decisions, bearing in mind that the shadow assembly will fall if it fails to do so?

Mr. Murphy: The limit is imposed on the basis of when the constitutional Bill is enacted by the House of Commons. That will put into legislation the exact time when the functions of the Northern Ireland Departments will be handed over to the new assembly. At that point, the assembly will cease to be a shadow body and the new assembly will take over.

As to the north-south situation, it was a matter of great discussion and negotiation in the last few weeks of the talks that it was important that Members elected to the Northern Ireland assembly should play a major role in determining the sorts of implementation bodies that would result from a north-south ministerial council. It would not be right for Ministers of this Government, with our Irish counterparts, to deal solely with those matters. It is a matter for those who will be elected in Northern Ireland on 25 June, in consultation with my right hon. Friend and other colleagues.

Mr. McCartney: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. With respect, he has not answered my question. The full constitutional Bill that transfers those powers will do so only if the shadow assembly has fulfilled the criteria that will allow a full assembly to come into being—it must agree the terms and functions of the north-south ministerial council and the terms and remit of the implementing bodies. Is there any time limit on the shadow assembly doing so? Bearing in mind the fact that the north-south ministerial council and the assembly are interdependent, the assembly cannot come into being until the shadow assembly takes that decision. When will the shadow assembly take the decision that will allow for the full constitutional Bill to transfer power?

Mr. Murphy: The deadline is set out in strand 2 of the agreement, which states that the implementation body should be agreed by the end of October. However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House today that if he felt that events were not progressing properly on the agreement, the Government will examine the matter in six months' time. That is the date that the agreement envisages. I hope that that helps the hon. and learned Gentleman.

The shadow executive committee will meet the Irish Government in the shadow north-south ministerial council and identify about six implementation bodies, which will be set up by the time the new institutions go live.

The Bill is designed to permit the first election to the new assembly and for the assembly then to begin in the roles envisaged for it in its shadow phase. The major Bill, which we shall introduce later this year, will provide for the agreement as a whole and will replace this Bill's provisions for the conduct of the assembly and regulate future elections. This Bill deals only with the immediate future, as I explained earlier.

Clause 1 sets up the new assembly and states its purpose in the shadow phase. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can refer specific matters to the

assembly—particularly those arising from the agreement. She might refer matters such as the assembly's final Standing Orders and preparations for the British-Irish council and for north-south activity. The parties in the assembly may also agree a work plan on the key issues. The Government will consult as far as possible before exercising the powers under the Bill, and we shall always seek to act in the spirit of the agreement. The schedule makes further provision for the assembly to get off to an effective start.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The Bill does not require the Presiding Officer to be a Member of the Assembly, but I understand that part of the agreement was that that should be the case. I refer hon. Members to the *Hansard* of the Northern Ireland assembly created in 1973, where they will see that the best part of a day was spent taking points of order regarding the election of the Presiding Officer. On that occasion, the Secretary of State had designated that the Clerk of the assembly should be the Presiding Officer until that election. If the Secretary of State is to make the appointment and it has to be a Member of the Assembly, I believe that the role should be clear from the beginning. Much time and energy was lost on that point on a previous occasion. Notwithstanding what was intimated to me during the last Division, I believe that there is a case for allowing the initial sittings of the assembly to be presided over by a distinguished former Speaker of the House of Commons or the Canadian or Australian Parliaments to ensure that the assembly is well run. It should not founder over issues regarding new Members who are probably not familiar with Westminster practice or with "Erskine May" procedure.

Mr. Murphy: That prejudges who will be elected to the assembly. I have not the slightest doubt that men and women of considerable ability will be elected to it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consult the parties before she makes her appointment. It is implicit in the agreement, and I am sure in the legislation as well, that that person will have to be elected to the assembly.

The Secretary of State will also provide a first set of Standing Orders to give a framework so that business can start reflecting those aspects in the agreement relevant to the shadow phase.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am sorry to be pedantic, as my hon. Friend may think, but as we are reaching the new millennium, there should not be much slack marking in the draftsmanship of the Bill.

Clause 1(2)(b) states that the Secretary of State may refer to the assembly

"such other matters as he thinks fit."

It is palpable that the Secretary of State is not a he, but a she. I do not know why we continue to use the male gender in the Bill, particularly when the draft statutory instrument states

"therefore, in exercise of the power conferred on her",

referring to the Secretary of State—her, rather than him. I am sorry to be pedantic, but it bugs me that in the Bill we do not recognise the gender of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Murphy: I take the point. I noticed it myself when I looked at the Bill. While my hon. Friend spoke, I consulted the Secretary of State. In her inimitable way, she said that she was not unduly perturbed by the references.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Nor should the right hon. Lady be perturbed, because under the Interpretation Act 1978, he means she.

Mr. Murphy: I take the point, and it covers any problem that we might have.

Clause 2 provides for elections to be held on 25 June, presuming of course that there has been a positive result in the referendum. As agreed in the talks, the election will be by single transferable vote, which has been used in Northern Ireland for many years for many different sorts of elections, with six Members being returned from each of the 18 parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. The franchise reflects that used in local elections.

We will make more detailed provision for the election in an order to come before the House in the next few weeks. One outstanding point that we shall need to resolve in that order is the method of filling vacancies in the assembly's membership. In the multi-party talks, some parties favoured doing that by a system of substitutions to preserve the original party balance; others favoured conventional by-elections. We said that we would consult on this, and we will welcome any comments offered to us in the coming weeks.

Mr. Hogg: This is one of the points that I raised in the previous debate. The impact of clause 3 is not clear to me. Does the Secretary of State propose to deal with vacancies on a case-by-case basis, or to introduce a general regime that will provide either for by-elections or for substitution, to be approved by affirmative procedure? In any event, does the hon. Gentleman accept that many of us feel that that is precisely the kind of issue that ought to be determined by the House and which should appear in the Bill?

Mr. Murphy: I partly agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but not wholly. The determination that my right hon. Friend will make will be based on a general principle, not on individual cases—that would certainly be wrong. The difference between the right hon. and learned Gentleman and me would be on the basis of consultation. The difference between this legislation and the legislation used for Wales and Scotland is that this is firmly rooted in the talks agreement—the settlement. In the course of two years, and especially in the past few weeks and months, the matter has raised its head. There is some disagreement among talks participants, as they were called. My right hon. Friend and I must consult more widely and come back to get the feeling of the House.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Is it not a fundamental abuse of the democratic principle if those who have been elected and who, by death or disability, are no longer fulfilling the office to which they were elected are not replaced in exactly the same democratic and electoral manner in which they were originally elected? Is there any room for debate about that?

Mr. Murphy: There certainly is room for debate. The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that debate was not to

[Mr. Murphy]

be lost in the talks that we had over all those months and years. He will also know that there are examples in many other countries around the world that operate on a strictly proportional basis where vacancies are filled by substitution according to the parties.

The difference of view lies in the nature of the proportional system. If it is a strictly additional Member system or a list system, substitution is the only way in which vacancies can be filled. The system that we propose is somewhere in the middle and needs proper consultation. That is why we have decided to talk more about the matter. It is not unusual or unprecedented in other democracies in the western world.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister's giving way. Does he accept that under the single transferable vote system in a six-Member constituency, if the person who came in last were to die, a different party could come in by another vote? Is that not one of the issues that must be considered?

Mr. Murphy: Indeed. That is why the matter must be examined in more detail.

Disqualification from membership of the assembly is largely the same as that in the House. Peers and citizens of the European Union will also, however, be allowed to sit, and so will members of the Senate of the Republic of Ireland.

The people of Northern Ireland yearn for peace and political stability. The party leaders and the British and Irish Governments, after more than two years of negotiation, have produced a settlement which, if agreed in the referendum, provides the basis for such a peaceful and stable society. The Bill is the beginning of a new era for the people of Northern Ireland who, as they move into the next century, will govern themselves in a new way that embraces the hopes and aspirations of all communities in Northern Ireland. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

5.26 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I confirm what I said at the Dispatch Box on Monday: my party warmly endorses the agreement. We believe that it is only the first stage in a process that we hope will reach a lasting settlement and peace in the Province.

There are already hiccups along the way, and it is regrettable that since the Secretary of State's statement on Monday, Sinn Fein has failed to endorse the agreement, as we thought it had on Good Friday, and that it is apparently advising its supporters to vote yes in the north and no in the south. That is an unsatisfactory state of affairs and confirms many of our fears about Sinn Fein-IRA. Notwithstanding that, I am sure that the Minister and the Secretary of State will continue to pursue the process and reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. That is the second time he has used the word process. Does he accept that that causes great concern to many people? It was highlighted in an article in *The Irish Times* yesterday, which stated that the miasma of peace is there to make way for the concept of process. In other words, we are not reaching a settlement; we are at a staging post in the process towards an ultimately united Ireland.

Mr. MacKay: I shall not pursue the line of argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). The process is long, but I hope that it will reach a lasting settlement. I hope that he will not think it insulting if I say that his argument is mere semantics and that there are more important matters to debate today.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Let us debate them.

Mr. MacKay: Turning to debate them, as my hon. Friend desires, I shall say straight away why we warmly support the Bill and why we have facilitated by an earlier vote the timetable motion and the Bill's being brought before the House so rapidly. We are dealing with an important but small measure and there has been a huge amount of misunderstanding outside the House. Regrettably, some of it has been deliberately created by certain hon. Members. The Bill is not the major constitutional measure that will set up the assembly. It is not the legislation that will change the prisoner release policy in the Province. Those are both major measures, and I am confident the Minister of State and the Secretary of State will want the House to give full time to them.

Let us remind people in Northern Ireland and elsewhere clearly, as the Minister did earlier, what the Bill is all about. The Bill will set up elections for the assembly, assuming that there is a yes vote in the referendum. My colleagues and I are strongly in favour of an assembly in Northern Ireland for reasons that I shall outline. The second purpose of the Bill is to set up a shadow assembly in exactly the same way as shadow local authorities were set up in my constituency about two years ago as part of local government reorganisation. This is not the time or place to discuss in any detail the permanent assembly. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said earlier, there are major issues to be discussed in that context, and that is for another day later in the year.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a Bill that sets up a shadow assembly for Northern Ireland—not a local government body—that in due course is to have legislative and executive powers and will have to decide the functions and contents of a north-south ministerial body and the remit of implementation bodies on an all-Ireland basis is in the context of Northern Ireland not a substantial and significant constitutional matter?

Mr. MacKay: The hon. and learned Gentleman is not correct. If I believed that the Bill, in passing through this place at a rapid pace, would set in place the assembly, with all its powers and responsibilities, the Opposition would not have agreed to its going through the House so quickly.

I do not want to repeat entirely what I said earlier, but this is a simple, straightforward Bill which sets up the elections for the assembly and sets up the shadow assembly. There will be a completely separate Bill introduced later. To quote the Minister, it will be a major constitutional Bill. He has given assurances that it will be

considered in the same detail as the devolution measures for Scotland and Wales. I welcome that assurance and I expected nothing less. It would be a disgrace if that were not the position. I am satisfied, and I cannot think of any other reasonable Member of this place who will not also be satisfied.

Going back about 10 years to my days as a parliamentary private secretary to the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), and subsequently as a founder member of the British-Irish parliamentary body, as a Government Whip dealing with the Northern Ireland Office and more recently as the shadow Secretary of State, I have always been privately profoundly uncomfortable with the fact that first-class politicians from both parties have been Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office and have served to the very best of their ability, which has often been considerable ability, yet elected Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies have had no opportunity to have a say in the running of the Province. In other words, there has been no possibility of their being Ministers.

Direct rule has had some obvious benefits. I do not believe that the Province would have been secure without direct rule. I believe that progress to reduce sectarian friction and violence has been considerable because of direct rule and because of successive Administrations of both parties. However, deep down, I guess that nearly all right hon. and hon. Members cannot feel entirely comfortable with the fact that Members who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland have had no opportunity to be directly involved with the administration of the Province.

Bearing in mind the fact that local parties, for reasons that we know—the arguments have been well rehearsed—have little powers in the Province, that is, to quote the Minister, a democratic deficit. We now have the opportunity, through the agreement, to put that right. One of the most attractive, positive and important elements in the agreement is that we shall have an assembly in Northern Ireland, which in due course will approve ministerial positions and will, I believe, remedy the democratic deficit. I believe that the responsibility of those ministerial positions for many politicians from many parties will have a sobering and positive effect on the politics of the Province. I look forward to that.

It would be wrong of me to give the impression to Ministers that we do not have reservations. Our reservations were made absolutely clear by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition from the Dispatch Box only a couple of hours ago. We were pleased with and gained some confidence from the letter that the Prime Minister wrote to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), but we have not yet seen the letter. It needs to be fully in the public domain. I am not criticising the Secretary of State, but she did indicate that it would be. The right way forward is for all this correspondence, if this has not already been done—I hope that I am now out of date—to be placed in the Library. If that has not been done—I can see the right hon. Lady nodding—it seems that it will be.

It is essential that no Member of the Assembly is promoted to be a Minister if the paramilitaries with which he or she is associated have not substantially decommissioned, or have in any shape or form continued with violence. I hope that there is consent across the Floor of the House that we cannot have such people having executive responsibility in the assembly. It would bring the assembly into disrepute, and I believe that it would bring down the whole process and a lasting settlement.

The Prime Minister's letter gives us some confidence, particularly when we read it in the Library. However, I think that the Minister of State will agree that the letter in itself is not enough. We completely understand that it was not practical to incorporate the letter into the heads of agreement of the Belfast agreement. We do not quibble about that. We are saying that the major constitutional Bill that will set up the assembly must contain appropriate clauses that completely satisfy right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, who I think share the concern that men of violence must not have ministerial responsibility.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Belfast agreement is the document on which we shall have to vote on 22 May—not that document plus the Prime Minister's letters, or an assurance from any Minister in this place? The Belfast agreement is the document. If the Government proceed in the way in which the hon. Gentleman is suggesting, the later Bill will not appear until after 22 May. People will not have an opportunity to consider other documents. They will say, "This document came through my door and I have been asked to say yes or no to it." The hon. Gentleman knows that no statement by any Minister can be added to a document that is to be voted on in a referendum.

Mr. MacKay: It was precisely for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition today sought assurances from the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time. I am seeking the assurance that in his winding-up speech the Minister will say that that will be covered in the legislation.

Mr. Hogg: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacKay: Perhaps I may be allowed to give a comprehensive answer to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

Such assurances will be helpful and will ensure that a substantial number of voters in the Province who have not yet made up their minds will be able to come to a decision.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have an advantage over him in that I have a copy of the letter. I shall pass it to my hon. Friend as long as he assures me that he will hand it back. The problem is that power will rest with the shadow assembly or the assembly, and the Prime Minister's letter merely states that the Government will support changes in the provisions. However, the power to make those changes lies with the assembly and is therefore outwith the Prime Minister's absolute discretion.

Mr. MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend makes a valid point, and I promise to return the letter to him. His intervention shows why my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I seek additional assurances in legislation. My right hon. and learned Friend is a

[Mr. MacKay]

distinguished lawyer and I am sure that he would be much happier if such assurances were in the major constitutional Bill and not at the discretion of the assembly.

Mr. Hogg: I do not wish to tease my hon. Friend, but it would be much nicer if the power were in the Bill that we are debating because we are also concerned with the shadow assembly. However, by agreeing to the timetable we have curtailed our ability to amend the Bill.

Mr. MacKay: I have known my right hon. and learned Friend long enough to know that he is perfectly happy to tease.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: I should like to respond to my right hon. and learned Friend's intervention before giving way again. It is not for the shadow assembly but for the full-blown assembly that is based on the constitutional Bill to decide on Ministers. I am quite happy for that not to be in this Bill as long as it is in the major constitutional Bill.

Mr. Thompson: Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that an agreement has been made and signed? The idea that it can be changed without the agreement of all the parties to it is nonsense. Little pieces of paper flying around are meaningless. The hon. Gentleman is being negligent. To say that the agreement can be changed is nonsense. Those who have signed have made their bed and they have to lie on it.

Mr. MacKay: I do not accept that, and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why if he will listen. We want provisions to be incorporated in the later Bill so that what he describes as little bits of paper floating around will be in a Bill.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: I should like to make a little progress. Those who are trying to intervene have complained that they do not have enough time for debate. I am anxious not to delay the House so that Members from the Province are able to speak fully on Second Reading and later.

I have two comments that go slightly wide of the Bill, but they cover the overall agreement and are important. First, it is essential to ensure that the agreement releases prisoners prematurely only when we are totally satisfied that they have renounced violence and will not commit further crimes. Perhaps more important, we must be satisfied that those with whom they associate have substantially decommissioned and have given up all forms of violence.

Secondly, we do not quibble with the setting up of an independent commission to look at policing in the Province. Far from being a trap, that will be an opportunity for the RUC, which is one of the world's bravest, most sensitive and courageous police forces. It has nothing to hide and much to gain. At times, its enemies have attempted to distort its work, but I am satisfied that the independent commission will be an opportunity to put the record straight once and for all.

On Monday, I said to the Secretary of State that any change must have the consent of the great majority of people in Northern Ireland and the consent of the parties in the House. Most important, it must have the consent of those who maintain the rule of law in Northern Ireland, and we shall watch carefully to ensure that.

Dr. Godman: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's positive comments on the independent commission. It might be well served if it were chaired by a Scots judge.

Mr. MacKay: I was happy with the hon. Gentleman's intervention until I felt that I was being drawn on the second part of it. He and I have had many happy debates over the years and I do not think that he would expect me to comment on his suggestion.

The assembly election presents great opportunities, and I wish the people of the Province well in electing its Members. In due course, the assembly will have real powers and responsibilities which I am sure the Members of the Assembly will discharge to the best of their considerable abilities. This is a positive day for democracy in the United Kingdom.

5.47 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): It will be difficult to consider the Bill in isolation from the other factors in the agreement. I shall try to resist the temptation to stray into other areas, but if I have to do that I shall try to limit it.

I pay tribute to Ministers in both Governments, the chairman of the talks process and all the people in the other parties for their remarkable tenacity and patience in the talks over the past two years. It is sometimes lost on people that the talks process has been going on for two years and did not suddenly start in the past two or three weeks. That important debate was frustrating and tedious and, at times, it did not seem to get very far, but it was essential to the end product. It was essential that, for the first time, people had a really serious political means by which to begin to gain an insight into not just the other person's argument but their own as well. That was crucial.

It was also crucial that relationships were built up over those two years. I believe that those relationships will stand us in good stead as we go into the next part of the process—the momentous time when the assembly and the north-south and east-west bodies have to be set up. I say that because there will be appreciation within the House of the time and effort that were required. It would be the equivalent of sitting on a Standing Committee for two years non-stop. Those of us who have taken part in Standing Committees for a few weeks realise the amount of detail involved. I pay tribute to all those people for their effort.

I believe that this a turning point. I will make no exorbitant claims, but, as I said on Monday, I believe that it was a mighty victory for the political process over violence, for pragmatism over ideologies which have outlasted their time and, above all, for the confidence and hope that exist in the human spirit to deal with problems that seem insurmountable. A combination of all those

things should allow us to recognise, irrespective of our views on some parts of it, that what was done was done in a way that will be fundamental.

We are dealing with one part of the strand 1 element of the agreement, which is the legislation to set up an assembly in the north of Ireland. I believe that an assembly in the north of Ireland is essential. Coming from my political perspective, that may sound strange, but I shall explain in terms of that perspective. Irrespective of what the constitutional position would be in Northern Ireland, whether we were talking about the north remaining in its present status or changing status to what is termed a united Ireland—if that ever came about—there would still be a need for a separate body in the north of Ireland to deal with the uniqueness of the north of Ireland. My political perspective does not colour my opinion that an assembly is necessary. I believe that its necessity in either set of circumstances is self-evident.

After the propositions document was issued by the two Governments when, for the first time in the talks process, public reference was made to an assembly, I and others were demonised for agreeing with or purporting to agree with a partitionist settlement. That criticism came in stringent terms from those in the nationalist community, largely represented by Sinn Fein. It showed the steps that had to be taken to gain an acceptance for the idea that the assembly is worth while.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Sinn Fein, fronting the IRA and exercising the violence that had a precipitating effect on the agreement, has not signed up to the agreement or accepted the principle of consent, such as it is? It has not agreed through its alter ego, the IRA, to decommission a single gun or a single ounce of Semtex. In those circumstances, is it right to say that this agreement heralds the peace that has produced hysteria and euphoria among many uninformed sections of the community, both on the mainland and in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me to stray into other considerations. I should like to answer his question, but I will finish the point that I was making.

When I was demonised over the assembly, one of the allegations was that I was giving power back to the Unionists. Another allegation was that it was a partitionist settlement—that it was reinforcing partition—and that the assembly would, in effect, be an old Stormont. One of the great satisfactions I feel is that it does none of those things. If the aim had been to do any of those things, this legislation would not have come out of the talks.

I shall now deal with the point raised by the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). I note the position of Sinn Fein and have done so for a considerable time. I note also that had its representatives taken their seats in the House today, they would not have been able to give an opinion. I also note that, if they were standing where I am, they could not say, "Yes, we support it" or "No, we do not support it." I have no doubt that there will come a time when not only will Sinn Fein be giving its opinions, but, unless I am sadly mistaken, we will find that it will be claiming enormous credit, even for the vilified assembly. Knowing the organisation as well as I do, I believe that that will happen.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down also referred to decommissioning. That is an area which we will debate in greater depth on another occasion. However, I have a sincere point to put to the main Opposition party. We all remember Washington 3. It took the Conservative Government many years to wriggle around and somehow get away from that precondition. Would it not be tactically wrong, at this stage or any other, to reinvent Washington 3 mark 2 and end up giving not a disadvantage but a negotiating advantage to those who hold the guns and an advantage in terms of public perception?

I make that point because I know of the sensitivities involved in the issue—I share them. I would be wary of giving any tactical advantage on that issue at this stage. We are setting up a democratic institution. The assembly will be democratic because, for the first time, it will provide an opportunity in the north of Ireland for all people, be they nationalists or Unionists, to work together on the basis of consent and to begin to deal with the problems and divisions of history that have caused us so many problems in the past and in the present. Is anyone seriously saying that it is not a good thing that this legislation would provide for nationalism and Unionism to work together in the same assembly, in the same Cabinet, in the same Administration at all levels, so that the strengths of each community can be jointly used by the entire community in a unity of purpose—this is the unity that counts—which will allow us to create something absolutely new in the north of Ireland?

Mr. Robert McCartney: I respect the sincerity with which those latter views are expressed, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that, for nationalism and particularly for Sinn Fein, this agreement is purely transitional—the final objective is a united Ireland? Within an assembly, that will be the objective of pan-nationalism, just as, within the same assembly, the objective of Unionism will be to prevent that from occurring. The assembly will be a constant unstable battle of political attrition that will render the prospects of peace and reconciliation highly unlikely.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. This is a very important debate and I do not wish to stifle the spontaneity of exchanges, but there is also a programme and limited time, therefore, for everyone to make a contribution.

Mr. Mallon: It is no secret to the hon. and learned Member for North Down that I want and demand the right, by peaceful, democratic, political means, to change the status of the north of Ireland. What this agreement does is allow the means whereby, by peaceful means alone, I and others like me can pursue that objective. Can anyone dispute that?

Mr. Peter Robinson: In the Cabinet.

Mr. Mallon: Yes, in the Cabinet, because never again will people who represent the nationalist community come in the tradesmen's entrance in any assembly. Never again are we going to find that we are permanently excluded from influence, power and responsibility at the highest level. Yes, in the Cabinet and, yes, at every level because that is surely what the essence of consent is. Consent is

[Mr. Mallon]

not just a Unionist requirement in constitutional terms. Consent is also there as an important part of the nationalist community's position.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Does that apply to Sinn Fein as well?

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman should talk to Sinn Fein. He has had the opportunity over two years. I will not act as a surrogate to take messages for him. I have no doubt that Sinn Fein will read them, but I take the point that was made, I think sincerely, by the hon. and learned Member for North Down. Every generation has a right to write its own history and no generation has the right to predetermine the future generation's position, in terms either of Unionism or, indeed, of nationalism.

One of the great disservices that has been done to Unionism over the years is that people have tried to impose the past on a changing present and to cater for the future in terms of that antediluvian past. There is the difference. This element of consent does allow people to work in that way—within Northern Ireland, yes; in this Parliament, yes; in the north-south bodies, yes; in the east-west bodies or the council of the isles, yes. Within that, people have a right, and will exercise it, to try to push and to state their political views, while recognising their duty to fulfil the responsibilities in terms of this legislation and agreement.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is that not the very point that has been made repeatedly over the years to Sinn Fein and, indeed, to the IRA? They have a perfectly legitimate political right to argue for a united Ireland, but they do not and will never have a right in law to try to achieve that by terrorism and violence.

Mr. Mallon: I agree with my hon. Friend. That surely is the essence of a democratic process. It rules out for ever any concept of the unification of Ireland by force, which is absolutely unacceptable and wrong. It also rules out for ever any notion that Unionism in any set of circumstances can be defended by force. Consent to that very important principle is a two-way process as well. I hope that that will be honoured in all ways by all those who agree that consent is very valuable.

Inclusivity is the other very important factor. The day the Sunningdale agreement and the arrangements that were set up there fell was one of the saddest of my life. One of the reasons why the agreement fell—there were many—was its lack of inclusivity. There is always a price for inclusivity. The question is: does the net result that is to be gained by it outweigh the price that has to be paid?

In those talks, I found myself sitting beside someone who had murdered the founding member of our party, a close friend of mine—not across the table, but next door. That is difficult for anyone, Unionist or nationalist, but that is what inclusivity means. Inclusivity does not mean that things can be staged. Inclusivity means that if people get the required electoral mandate, they are members of that assembly. What is more, it means that they are members of that Government.

The interesting thing is that not one party in the talks did not adopt and recommend the d'Hondt system of inclusivity, so, when we debate this further down the line, let us remember that that is the system which was recommended by every single political party. It will have its price in terms of sensitivities, but the net gain in terms of the well-being of people—all people—in the north of Ireland will be seen further down the line.

The ethos of political life in Ireland north and south will change substantially. One has to look only at the constitutional change that will be undertaken by the people in the Republic of Ireland when they go to the referendum to see the extent to which a new ethos will be accommodated in Irish political life.

I think that it is there for all of us to make the adjustments. There are things in this that I do not like. There are things in it that I would have preferred otherwise, but we have all got to live with the parts that we do not like for the greater and, indeed, wider good of everyone we represent.

Mr. Stott: My hon. Friends the Members for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and I have been members of the British-Irish inter-parliamentary body for a number of years. It has made remarkable progress in understanding our positions both on the island of Ireland and on Great Britain. There are two empty chairs and those chairs have not been filled by our Unionist colleagues on the Opposition Benches. It is a tragedy that they have not been there over the years to try to facilitate greater understanding between all our parties and our two nations.

Mr. Mallon: In fact, there were three empty chairs. Mine was empty for the last two plenary sessions because the meetings coincided with crucial stages of the talks. We hope to put that right. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Perhaps the council of the isles could encourage Unionist members to play their role in an inter-parliamentary body. If my memory serves me right, in 1986 one of the requirements of the Ulster Unionist party's policy was an inter-parliamentary body. Then, the Anglo-Irish Agreement made a subtle mistake—it found that requirement favourable, so the UUP's policy changed. I do not think that this is a matter of principle for any Unionist, but, in pure political tactical terms, it would be the right thing to do.

I welcome the change relating to disqualification. I served in the Seanad Eireann in 1982, but suffered the ignominy of being hauled before the courts and disqualified from the Northern Ireland Assembly. It did not cause me great concern, but it certainly cost me a great deal of money that I could not afford. Eminent lawyers from both north and south were intent on proving that the Republic of Ireland was no longer a member of the Commonwealth. Be that as it may, I am glad, belatedly, to see the provision go, because it would have been out of tune with the actual thinking and ethos of the agreement.

Of course, getting rid of that piece of legislation will be hailed as another notch—I have to be careful with my terminology—another gain by Sinn Fein. I would have to say to Sinn Fein members, as gently as I could, "Sorry, mates—been there, done that, long before you ever thought of it."

My final point relates to the replacement of members, which is a serious issue. The entire proportionality of the assembly, of its committees and, indeed, of its Cabinet

could be distorted if the proportionality on which the assembly was set up were disturbed. We can imagine circumstances in which someone could be sitting as a Minister, but a member of his party dies and at the by-election the party is not returned. Can he then continue to sit as a Minister when the proportionality upon which he was appointed has changed? Imagine how difficult it would be in the by-election process when, in effect, all the parties have recommended proportionality. I ask the Minister to consider that point very carefully, because the entire proportional basis for the assembly could be unhinged.

I welcome the Bill. It will be remarkably different; it will be historic in its own right. There will be difficulties—difficulties in the referendum, difficulties in the election, difficulties in setting up the assembly, difficulties in getting it to operate and difficulties in getting the type of mechanics that are required from a standing start. However, it is a good agreement which stands up to scrutiny, so the one thing that is now needed is inspiration. The people of the north of Ireland need to begin to believe that they can—that we all can—solve this problem. They look to the political parties for that inspiration.

Some will cherry-pick, I have no doubt; some will nitpick, I have no doubt; some will try not to pick, and I have no doubt about that either; but do we not all owe it to the people of the north of Ireland, who have lived through a crucible for almost 30 years, to put our nitpicking to one side and to try to inspire them to give the response that I am confident they will give on the day of the referendum and in future months? That is our challenge.

I put it to those who are opposed to the Bill that there is always something bigger than one's own argument; there is always something more important than one's own ideology; there is always something much more fundamentally important than what we think. I make the plea to them, on this occasion, to think of all the people who live in the north of Ireland and the future that they face.

6.15 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I have been in this House for a fair number of years and, during that time, I have seen cross-party support on a few occasions. It has always been the prelude to disaster. It means that the legislation before the House is not examined in detail and that grave errors will not be exposed. Of course, that is not to say that some legislation, such as the poll tax, which received ferocious opposition did not also prove to be a disaster. When all the major parties put their names to the same bit of paper, heaven help us all in the long run.

When such cross-party support is allied to the rapid passage of legislation—in this case, within 24 hours—the probability of disaster is multiplied. I remind the House of one piece of legislation that went through the House in 1972, which removed the Stormont parliamentary system. Ever since, this House has been engaged in one initiative after another in an attempt to replace it, with scant success.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): Does my hon. Friend remember the Child Support Agency legislation, which this House enthusiastically passed and now enthusiastically condemns?

Mr. Ross: The House would enthusiastically love to murder that legislation, if only it could think of something to put in its place. No doubt Ministers are beavering away and will come up with something to replace it in due course.

This debate is supposed to be about the principle of the Bill, but, as the Bill will create an assembly in Northern Ireland in line with the agreement signed within the past week, it is inevitable that the whole question of an assembly will intrude into our deliberations. My view of any assembly is that it should be both democratic and able to work efficiently. Quite frankly, when I apply those criteria to the proposed body, I fear that it will not be the success that those who laud it believe it will be. The end result will be very different.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was present when the House joined together to endorse the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. The Conservative Government said that their aim was to strengthen the Union and the Labour Opposition, under Mr. Kinnock, said that it was a step, albeit a small one, in the direction of a united Ireland. The agreement promised peace, stability and reconciliation for everyone, but ended up with hundreds upon hundreds of deaths, mutilations and mass destruction. Are we in for the same thing again as a result of the happy and unctuous togetherness of the House?

Mr. Ross: To that I would add that Baroness Thatcher, who was then Prime Minister, said that she had signed the agreement to stop the violence, but she came very rapidly to understand that that was not just going to happen.

Before the people of Northern Ireland are really in a position to judge whether the assembly will work, they need to have a very clear understanding of what has been agreed by the parties. Even before the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) intervened, it was clear from what we have heard today that those who are pushing the assembly as the way forward certainly have very different ideas, hopes and aspirations as to where it will end up. We all know that the language of the agreement is ambiguous and that one can take any one of half a dozen meanings from it and extend it in any direction.

The agreement sets up an assembly of 108 Members, a north-south ministerial council and implementation bodies. I noticed that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) swiftly skated over what the implementation bodies were, how they were going to operate and whether they would be able to continue to exist if something went wrong with the assembly, although I do not think that they would be needed then as we also have a British-Irish council, which is the Irish way of saying a British Isles council.

There is also to be a British-Irish intergovernmental conference. Some interesting paragraphs in the agreement state that other types of implementation bodies could be created within that between London and Dublin, bypassing the others if they so wished.

Of course, there will also be certain constitutional changes. As far as I can see, the Bill, sadly, does not detail the changes in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, but the agreement makes it plain that in future the Union will be defended only by the votes of the people in a referendum, which is to be held every seven years or

[Mr. Ross]

thereabouts. I find that very interesting because the legislation that already exists for the specific purpose of providing for border polls to ask exactly the same question stipulates a minimum of 10 years. Why on earth have we departed from the 10-year rule?

I recall from my brief glance through the so-called Mitchell document that it stipulated five years. We have now gone up to seven, but there was no need for that issue to be raised in the agreement at all. The possibility of a having border poll already existed. Indeed, we could have held one next year. It might not have been a bad idea to hold one now so that before people signed up to this agreement, one could find out whether they were prepared to enter a united Ireland or not.

As most of the Unionist population in Northern Ireland are rapidly coming to the conclusion that the agreement drives us down that road, we would have had a very clear answer before we started erecting a house of cards on a sandy foundation. I believe that the existing legislation allowing for polls to ask whether Northern Ireland is part of Her Majesty's dominions or part of the Irish Republic was quite sufficient, and there was no need for the issue to be raised at all.

The Bill also sets out the make-up of the assembly. There are to be 108 Members. Well, there are, I think, 129 in Scotland which has an electorate of nearly 4 million, and there are 60 for Wales, which has an electorate of just over 2 million. It is interesting that the Government have to bribe all the politicians they can in Northern Ireland with the possibility of a seat in order to ensure that a large number of folk will be prepared to support the proposal within the councils of the various parties.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does my hon. Friend agree that even the simplest soul in Northern Ireland realises that this unnecessary and unjustifiable number has been decided on to minimise Ulster Unionist influence?

Mr. Ross: I agree with my hon. Friend as far as he went, but he should have gone on to point out that the real reason for it was to ensure that the maximum number of Sinn Fein and Protestant paramilitary representatives would be elected. That is the reason for six Members per constituency. Many of those people simply could not get elected on the basis of five per constituency.

Of course, we all know that the weird and wonderful electoral system for the Northern Ireland forum that we are going to bring to an end later this evening was not designed to ensure proper or equitable representation. It was designed, created and used to ensure that all the paramilitaries would manage to get people elected. Once elected, they were able to bring in the same number of people as the major parties in Northern Ireland, so each and every one was on the same footing, although, in fact, there was unequal support for them across the community. That is the only reason for the large number of representatives in Northern Ireland.

The number is even more amazing when we find that the very small number of Northern Ireland Ministers claim that they are doing a very good job at present—they must have a very low opinion of the capacities of the people of Northern Ireland if it takes 108 of them to do what five Ministers are doing at the moment.

We know that the Secretary of State and her Ministers have appointed many quangos to do their job for them. They have expended huge sums of public money without any reference to the democratic principle. In any event, there are now going to be 108 representatives, which is absolutely crazy. It becomes even crazier when one remembers that we now have a civic forum comprising the great and good and those appointed from the voluntary sector. We do not know who is appointing them, or on what criteria, how many of them there are or how they will be funded or staffed, but there is no question but that they will be staffed. It will be the super-quango to end all super-quangos, and it will be the new factory of grievances within Northern Ireland to act as a counterbalance to the assembly when it is set up.

Given all the voting systems in the assembly, it is peculiar that it is only on the issue of leaving the United Kingdom that a simple majority—50 per cent. plus 1—is required. On nearly every other issue, a weighted majority is required. I know the agreement says that within the assembly most votes will require a simple majority, but that depends on whether a decision is considered to be a key decision. The truth is that as it takes only 30 members of that assembly to demand a vote on the basis of a decision being a key decision, nearly everything other than the most minor will be treated as a key decision demanding a weighted cross-community vote to carry it.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Would it be accurate to say, as was said to me at the weekend, that for cross-community issues one has to identify oneself as either "Unionist" or "Alliance"? That would mean, for example, that the Alliance party and any other party of such a nature would not have a status equal to that of other parties.

Mr. Ross: My hon. Friend is correct. One will have to wear a little tab saying, "I'm a Unionist, or "I'm a Nationalist", and the Alliance party tab would have to say something like, "I'm in the middle so I don't really count". I do not know how on earth the Alliance people are going to be weighed in the balance. There will have to be two of them on each side to show that the issue in question has cross-community support. Perhaps instead of declaring ourselves as Unionists or nationalists, we will have to say, "I'm a Roman Catholic" or "I'm a Prod", whatever that may mean, or something else. This matter has not been dealt with so far, and it is remarkable that no one has raised it before.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Is not it outrageous that the agreement asks that people tell us who they represent once the election is over? It is only after the election that they have to determine whether they are Unionists or nationalists. In some cases, people will no doubt determine that on the basis of what suits the voting in the assembly that will then be elected.

Mr. Ross: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will want to pursue that point and I certainly hope that he does. He has raised a number of interesting issues that have not yet been resolved.

Let me turn to the method of dismissing the representatives of murder from the Northern Ireland Executive. There is no way in which we can keep them out. After the election there will be a cross-community

election to decide on the Presiding Officer and the deputy presiding officer. There will then be another to elect the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. After that, the d'Hondt system of proportional representation will come into play when Members of the Assembly Committees elect Chairmen on the basis of party strength.

The d'Hondt system is automatic and one can predict the result using the numbers in the forum that will come to an end within a few days. There will probably be two SDLP Ministers and almost certainly two Sinn Fein Ministers in the Northern Ireland Government. In other words, terrorist representatives will sit on the Executive at the very heart of the Government of Northern Ireland with full Executive powers to run a Department within the broad-brush principles that have been set out.

Once the terrorists are in place, it will be almost impossible to remove them because that would require a cross-community vote. I cannot envisage the two SDLP representatives in the assembly voting to remove Mr. Adams, regardless of what the IRA is doing outside.

It seems to me from my reading of the document that the party or group to which a political representative belongs is not relevant; it is whether the individual in post has misbehaved or not. Unless the Minister is found wearing a balaclava, holding a smoking gun, with a corpse in front of him and nobody else within 100 yd, he will be safe. It will be impossible to get rid of him and he will be allowed to continue running the schools, the Department of the Environment or deciding where money will go for industrial development in Northern Ireland. It is a crazy system and is a consequence of having an Executive for Northern Ireland. It is a long way from where my party started in the process.

Although the Prime Minister's letter is very well written and carefully crafted, it does not mean as much as a puff of smoke. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) pointed out, he needs the agreement of all parties to the talks before he can make any change—otherwise the whole system will fall.

I listened with care to what has been said and I have set out the position in terms of the expulsion of the spokesmen for murder—not only from the IRA, but perhaps from the Ulster Democratic party or the Progressive Unionist party. The same system applies. The terrorists—along with their colleagues in the SDLP, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made perfectly clear—are intent on destroying the Union and they will be put in where they can exert the maximum influence to bring that about. It does not seems to be a sensible way to proceed if one is a Unionist. If the Government wanted to retain the unity of the United Kingdom, they should have tried to do something sensible about it.

There is another little problem that we shall come to later, but I hope that, to some extent at least, it will be addressed in the Secretary of State's reply to the debate. I am sure that the Secretary of State and the Ministers will have read the reports of the Select Committee and the Northern Ireland forum on electoral fraud and seen the evidence. The most powerful evidence in that respect did not come from the Democratic Unionist party, the UK Unionist party or the Ulster Unionist party; it came from Mr. Attwood who represents the SDLP on Belfast city council. It was perfectly plain that massive fraud was being committed by Sinn Fein-IRA in creating votes especially in Belfast, mid-Ulster and Armagh.

What are the Secretary of State and the chief electoral officer doing or what have they done to prevent electoral fraud in the referendum? What steps have they taken to identify people? The Secretary of State knows that one organisation in Northern Ireland has the photographs of more than 900,000 citizens and information about them and could print proper identity cards within a week if it were given the go ahead. I shall return to that at a later stage. The right hon. Lady should know to which organisation I refer, as I hope that only one organisation has that many photographs and is perfectly legal, although the Army and the police may also have the same information. That organisation is perfectly capable of doing the job and a few years ago set up a team to look into producing identity cards for the entire United Kingdom. It has the photographs and they could produce the cards within a week or so. Has the Secretary of State taken any steps towards producing proper identification for electoral matters and other matters in Northern Ireland? I am certain that she has not.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does my hon. Friend accept that the excuse that there is not time to change the current legislation is given the lie by the fact that today's legislation will go through in a matter of hours? In other words, legislation dealing with identity can be changed if there is the will to do so.

Mr. Ross: Of course. If that can be done for one measure, it can be done for another. The fact that the authorities have footled around for the past 10 years is a clear indication that no one wants to be the one to do it, as Sinn Fein-IRA benefits most from the fraud that is taking place.

I am also greatly concerned that, despite all the claims that are being made that the Maryfield secretariat is to disappear, it will remain, but in a different room. It is backed up by the ability to create cross-border bodies, regardless of the existence of the assembly, via a mechanism set up in the context of the British-Irish council and the British-Irish intergovernmental conference.

I am a sceptic, and that is how I am described in the Unionist party at the moment. I have heard the term before and have always been proud to wear that label. To me, a sceptic means someone who looks at what the Government are doing and says, "I see their words, but what the blazes are they really up to?" Whenever I ask that question I often do not like the answer. Nor do Ministers like me asking the question.

I have concerns about the legislation and about the power of the Secretary of State in the schedules to the Bill. In my view, the measure has been rushed. We shall return to the amendments later and the legislation will be rammed down the throats of the people of Northern Ireland who will reap the misery that will be caused by this whole miserable affair.

6.37 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): It is always interesting to listen to the deeply sceptical speeches by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). Earlier he spoke about Unionism and the United Kingdom. In a wider context, with regard to the multinational state that we call the United Kingdom, we

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

are taking part in what can be described only as profound and radical constitutional change. What is taking place in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales will reshape the United Kingdom. I offered that point to the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), at the time of the framework document. I said that two or three paragraphs in that document referring to a Northern Ireland assembly represented the beginnings of constitutional change.

Speaking as a federalist, I also said in the company of the then Prime Minister at a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Dumfries in June 1996, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), now Deputy Speaker, that in my view with regard to constitutional change in the United Kingdom, within 20 years Scotland would be either an independent nation or a constituent nation in a federal Britain. As a federalist, I think that we are heading down the federal road.

I shall be brief, as I know that many hon. Members are anxious to speak. Last week, in an article that I wrote on the peace talks for my local paper, the *Greenock Telegraph*, I said that I had prayed on Good Friday that the participants would reach a tolerable accommodation—I have no doubt that I was in a large congregation in my prayers on that day.

Many of my constituents—I need hardly say this to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) or the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley)—have deep family ties with the people from both traditions in Northern Ireland, and I know that some of the Unionist Members are regular visitors to my constituency.

We have other ties with Northern Ireland. Not so long ago, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), I came across a platoon of young Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders down on the border. I had the good sense not to talk to them, as I could see that they were nervous—I speak as someone who served his national service with the Royal Military Police. At a guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, several of those 20 or so young lads would have come from our constituencies, as the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders recruit widely in Glasgow and Renfrewshire.

Incidentally, a local Orangeman—Unionist Members will confirm that there are a few Orangemen in Greenock and Inverclyde—reminded me of the words of the Ulster poet, the late John Hewitt, who wrote in one of his poems:

"Celt, Britain, Roman, Saxon, Dane and Scot
Time and this island tied a crazy knot".

I see some of the Unionist Members nodding. He also said:

"This is my country. If my people came from England four centuries ago, the only trace that is left is in my name."

That is something which hon. Members who represent mainland Britain constituencies should remember. I have heard absurd people on the extreme left of British politics talk about white settlers in Northern Ireland. I find that disgraceful—the family of one of my best friends in Belfast moved from Scotland in 1612, so has been there a lot longer than many Irish Americans have been in America.

I welcome the Bill, although I have a couple of concerns. On clause 3, I believe that any vacancies in the assembly can be filled only through a by-election—that is the right and proper way in which to fill vacancies in any assembly or Parliament. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is sitting immediately in front of me, has some reservations about that, but a by-election is the only truly democratic way in which to fill a vacancy created by the death or retirement—or, dare I say, the imprisonment—of a Member. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take note of that.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman in so far as what he says applies to single-Member constituencies, but does he recognise that, under the single transferable vote system, that approach may distort the concept of democracy?

Dr. Godman: I am not so sure about that. I recall that there were two recent by-elections in the Irish Republic, in Limerick and in Dublin. They were won, I am pleased to say—

Mr. Stott: By Labour.

Dr. Godman: By the Irish Labour party—my hon. Friend should be a little more accurate. That may cause problems in the Dail for the Taoiseach, but I do not think that filling vacancies in such a democratic way would cause problems, and I cannot believe that the hon. Member for Belfast, South is arguing that they should be filled in any other way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman should not labour that point, which is the subject of an amendment that the Chairman of Ways and Means has selected. The House will be able to consider it in greater detail in Committee.

Dr. Godman: I always abide by your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker—some would call it your instruction.

I was not being facetious when I suggested to the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), that we consider holding an international architectural competition for the design of a new assembly. I am delighted that the Minister of State, my hon. and old Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), is here, as he may recall that when I suggested a similar idea some six years ago for the design of a Scottish Parliament, my Scottish parliamentary colleagues laughed me out of the building. However, some 90 firms of architects from throughout the world are now keen to secure that commission.

I assure the House that I shall return to this question. I am conscious of the cost of such a project in Northern Ireland, but similar concerns were raised in the House about the design and building of a new Scottish Parliament. I believe that such a project should be seriously considered, to attract the very best international architects. I should be delighted if an architect from Northern Ireland won the competition, but we should throw it wide open, as we did for the design of the national museum of Scotland and the Scottish Parliament. A new assembly in Northern Ireland—

Mr. Peter Robinson: We have already got one.

Dr. Godman: I know there is one already; I am suggesting a new building.

I believe that a substantial yes vote north and south of the border would offer a remarkable future for the people of all of these islands. I have some reservations—I say this as a friend of the people of the Irish Republic—about the fact that two referendums will be held on the same day south of the border, which may cause problems. I cannot believe that Sinn Fein will argue yes in the north and no in the south—that is utterly illogical. Whatever Sinn Fein's reservations, I do not think that it will argue for a no vote in the south.

As I said, we are experiencing a dramatic constitutional change to our multinational state—I say that as some Opposition Members refer to our multinational state as "this country"—and I sincerely hope that we shall end up with a federal system that incorporates Northern Ireland. I believe that the Bill is good; it will open the door to what could be a remarkable, peaceful and stable future for the people of these islands.

6.48 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I am informed that this debate will end at 8.13 pm, so I shall be as brief as possible. If the hand of history is so heavy upon us, as the Prime Minister said, it is strange that the leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour party and of the Ulster Unionist party are not present. If it is such an important debate, it is strange that those who did so much to get us where we are today are not here to hear and respond to our objections. They should have been here.

It is wrong to say that the ordinary people of Northern Ireland are cherry-picking or nit-picking. Perhaps hon. Members do not care, because they have not been in the midst of the sorrows, as some of us have. I believe not only in sensitivity but in reality.

When considering a document that promises the release of all prisoners, no matter what murders or other crimes they have committed or what sentences they are supposed to serve, it is best for us to mention those who committed crimes on this side of the water, because I know that republicans tell us that there is no justice in the courts of Northern Ireland and they wave aside sentences by saying that there was no jury.

Take Patrick Magee, an IRA bomber who was behind the audacious terrorist outrage in Britain when the Tory conference in Brighton was bombed. His target was the Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher. She escaped, but five people were killed and many were injured. The trial judge handed down eight life sentences and described Magee, now 47, as a man of exceptional cruelty and inhumanity, but in two years he will be out. That is what the document asks us to agree to.

Take Paul Kavanagh, part of the IRA active service unit that targeted London in the month-long campaign in 1981. He was involved in the bombing of Chelsea barracks, in which two people died. When he was convicted in 1985, he was told by the trial judge:

"It may be that no Home Secretary will ever think it right to release you."

Now 42, he is serving five life sentences and was expected to serve at least 35 years; but in two years he, too, will walk the streets free.

The murderers are not only on one side of the fence: Johnny Adair, believed to have organised the shooting of up to 20 people, was gaoled for 16 years in 1995 for being a commander of the Ulster Freedom Fighters. A Belfast court was told that Adair, 33, was sinister, manipulative and dedicated to the cause of naked sectarianism, with a hatred of those whom he regarded as militant republicans. In two years he, too, will walk the streets free.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is legitimate, when assessing such individuals for release, to consider their personal transformation and renunciation of violence, but that the moment one adds into the equation a consideration of whether their former colleagues or their faction are party to an agreement, one admits that they are political prisoners?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman knows little about what is happening in the gaols of Northern Ireland. I know plenty, as I have been a prison chaplain for years. There is no sign of repentance in the gaols. They are run as academies for terrorism. The slogans are on the wall. When a person is killed outside, the cheers go up in the prisons. I have heard them.

People keep saying that they are sensitive to the fears, but people on both sides of the religious divide who have been robbed of their wives, husbands or children, or who have given their boys in the defence of their country against the so-called Irish Republican Army, say to me, "What did they die for? To have the killers let out because an agreement has been made?"

I do not know how the House can persuade people that that is the way to peace. The people who have put their finger on the agreement have not apologised by any act or word. There are no fruits meet for repentance.

The two Prime Ministers told us that decommissioning would be addressed first of all and that there would be no talks until it was dealt with, but it was put back and back and back. For the 14-odd months that my party and the UK Unionist party were in the talks, it was said that there was no progress, but when we left the talks there was still no progress until almost the last minute. We were not holding back progress: there was no progress for many months after we left.

We told the people of Northern Ireland in our election literature that if the Government did not deliver decommissioning, the terrorists' representatives who came to the table would have a tremendous advantage, because they could say, "If you don't do what we say, we return to violence." There was not a level playing field. We said that if that happened, we would go, and then we were blamed for keeping our pledge to our constituents. I have no apology to make to the House or to anybody for keeping to what I am mandated to do.

It is strange that the majority of Unionist representatives in the House speak today with one mind, despite their differences on other matters. Those who should be here to defend the document are strangely absent.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): This is the second occasion on which the hon. Gentleman has referred to my party leader, John Hume. He may not be aware of the fact, but Mr. Hume was present in our debate on Monday and had to leave for Brussels on urgent business that the

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

hon. Gentleman will be much more aware of than I am. That is where he is today. We hope to be able to represent his views to the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On this occasion, I was referring not to Mr. Hume but to the leader of the Ulster Unionist party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps when the hon. Gentlemen refer to any hon. Member, they will mention the constituency rather than the surname.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should have said, "the hon. Member for Foyle".

All I can say is that the debate lacks reality, when those who proclaim the agreement as the best way forward for Northern Ireland cannot come to the House and debate it with us. The same issue is before the forum.

People say that the Democratic Unionists and the United Kingdom Unionists are not prepared to engage Sinn Fein-IRA in debate. My councillors meet them in debate in the local councils all the time. They would not come to the forum because they would not debate on a level playing field. We invited them to come, but they would not. Debating with such figures is not negotiating one's country's future with them. There is a great difference between debating and negotiating, and that needs to be made clear to the House.

This all came to a head when Mr. Mitchell, who was forced on the forum—he was not the elected chairman, as we in the forum were not even allowed to say whether we wanted him; he was pushed on to us—issued a document. Everyone was told that it must not be leaked and that no one else must see it, because the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and Gerry Adams had a document that the people of Northern Ireland had never seen. All this has flowed from that document, and we have been kept blind to it.

We now have a new document; the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) told the people that it was a terrible document and that he could not negotiate on it. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) said that he would not touch it with a 40-ft bargepole because it was so terrible. The Alliance man—we have alliance representatives here—Lord Alderdice, said that he could not agree with it either and told the Prime Minister, "Get over here quickly, or all is lost."

Now, we have been told that there have been radical changes, that sweat was broken, assurances were given and all the promises made and at last a document has been achieved—the agreement—which is the salvation. I happened to get a copy of the document that Mr. Mitchell put out, and I and my friends went through it carefully. There has been no substantive change. In fact, any changes were not for the good of the Unionist people. The one change that stood out was the release of all the prisoners in two years, which was not in the original document. Instead of improving the situation, the new document was worse.

Mr. Forsythe: Does not the hon. Gentleman think it an absolute disgrace that if the murderer of the Roman Catholic gentleman from my constituency, who was sitting outside a Gaelic club when he was murdered, is brought to justice, he will be released in two years, after all the condemnation of that murder?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows my feelings about that matter.

We are not considering an assembly with any power—it is not something that any Unionist or any real democrat would accept. The schedule to the Bill states:

"Meetings shall be held at such times and places as the Secretary of State directs."

The Secretary of State will say when and where the assembly will meet. If she does not want it to meet, it will not and if she does—this is what the Bill says and what every supporter of the agreement will vote for tonight—the schedule states:

"Proceedings shall be conducted in accordance with standing orders."

Who makes those standing orders? It is the Secretary of State, and if she does not like what is going on, she can change them at any time. Is that democracy?

The schedule continues:

"The Secretary of State shall appoint . . . the initial presiding officer, and . . . the initial deputy presiding officer."

However, they do not even need to be appointed from inside the assembly, as the schedule does not state that they must be appointed from among the elected representatives. Someone could be appointed from outside, as Mr. Mitchell was pushed in from outside. That is what the Bill states. We must immediately ask ourselves whether we can vote for such a document. How could we?

When a Member resigns his seat, how will it be filled? We are not even told. There are arguments for a six-Member constituency. I have been elected to the European Parliament on a single transferable vote. God forbid that anything should happen to the hon. Member for Foyle, but if it did, the Social Democratic and Labour party would not have a seat. I know all about that. We should be told. This should not be airy-fairy. Let us hear what the Government are going to do, but oh no, the Secretary of State is all-powerful.

The schedule also states:

"References to standing orders are to orders determined by the Secretary of State from time to time and notified to the presiding officer."

The Secretary of State could sit in her office and say, "I don't like the way the assembly carried out its business yesterday. Here is a new order. Send that off to the Clerk and call them to order." Is that democracy? If hon. Members think that it is, let them vote for it, but the people of Northern Ireland are aghast.

I could mention many other aspects of the Bill, but we do not have the time to discuss it. In fact, to discuss it in this House is to discuss it with people who are deaf, because they are determined to vote for it. However, I am glad, because no one fought harder than I did to get a referendum. I did not want a referendum in the south of Ireland—that has nothing to do with our position—but I wanted one in the north. Of course, the voting day has been changed. We never vote on a Friday, but we have to vote on the same day as the south, and that is why the day has been changed. We have always voted on a Wednesday for local government and on a Thursday for

Parliament, but that has all changed—get it as near as possible to what happens in the south, and then we shall have the vote.

I have one question for the Secretary of State. At the forum, we were told, "It must be consensus. You must have a majority from the Unionist and the nationalist sides of the House or nothing can carry." If it is proven at the election that the majority of the Unionist people say no, what will the Government do?

7.7 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I will take in earnest your warning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about being brief.

Listening to the debate and in particular to the speeches by hon. Members representing the various Unionist parties, one could be very depressed this afternoon about the future for the people of Northern Ireland. The genesis of this simple Bill was the agreement of Good Friday—I mean Good Friday not in a religious but in a political sense. Hon. Members would be misled if they took many of the remarks made this evening to be the attitude of the people of Northern Ireland. I can but remember on the Friday, Saturday and Easter Sunday the huge euphoria and the welcome that people, at least in my constituency, gave the agreement, be they Unionist, nationalist or non-committed. Every single one of them without exception said, "Thank God you have got together. We hope that you can make the arrangements," as we have done substantively, "and give us peace for ourselves and for our children." That was the response that I felt, but I have not felt it during the debate—it is as if I am in a foreign clime.

My constituency is roughly evenly divided, and its people represent the aspirations of all the cross-sections in Northern Ireland. Right across the spectrum, from extreme Unionism to extreme nationalism, there was acceptance of the agreement in my constituency, and I believe that that is reflected in many other constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney: On Monday last, I went to the village of Lisbellaw in Fermanagh to address what I was told would be a meeting of 60 people; 450 turned up at the hall, and 80 stood in the doorway for three hours. All were solidly against the agreement.

Mr. McGrady: I do not know whether to thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his intervention, but perhaps the eloquence of his delivery rather than his arguments brought so many people to the hall. That is for the public to decide at a future time.

The Bill is an enabling measure, and it follows the agreement on Good Friday after, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said, a gestation period of two wearying and frustrating years. The negativity of Members representing the various Unionist parties does not reflect honestly the feeling of the people of Northern Ireland. I do not dispute their right to promote such an attitude, but they are not conveying to hon. Members the euphoria and hope felt by the people of Northern Ireland on Good Friday.

The agreement on which the Bill is based is founded on equality, respect and fairness. Built into it throughout are mechanisms for the protection of the aspirations of nationalists or of Unionists and for the prevention of one side overriding, outdoing or in some way conning the other. The people will decide on 22 May whether they support the agreement or not. I hope and am convinced that it will be endorsed substantively.

To express the democratic wish about which we hear so much and which is of paramount importance, the Bill will enable that decision to be initially implemented through the creation of the shadow assembly and the corresponding bodies dealing with the north-south and east-west relationships. We in the Social Democratic and Labour party have laboured for over a quarter of a century to bring those concepts together, as we consider them to be the only way in which to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland, to achieve justice and to protect the various aspirations.

A difficult part of the process, which is often forgotten, is the weaning of people away from the gun, the bomb, the bullet, the punishment beatings and the rest of the paraphernalia of violence and into the democratic process. That will not happen overnight. The process will not embrace all the extremes of our society. We should remember the young men who were shot yesterday in Portadown and extend our sympathy to their families. Violence will continue. It cannot be switched off completely, but I hope that it will decrease, and we must bring into the process those who previously espoused violence.

The agreement creates a situation in which we can all express our aspirations and political philosophies and work for them strongly, but where each is protected from the other by its terms. No one—no party or group of parties—will be able to impose his will on another because protections are in place. It will be difficult, but I should love to think that we shall go forward into this new process with such an ethos.

Those who oppose the agreement and are campaigning to reject out of hand all the work that has been done have given no alternative to the people over the past two and a half decades of violence. At least we have addressed in the agreement the problem of relationships in the north of Ireland, and the problem of relationships between north and south and between east and west. If the agreement goes wrong, so be it, but let the people decide on 22 May and 25 June. We should take their word forward and work with it positively rather than negatively. That is the message on which the Bill is based.

I have two comments on the Bill, the first of which concerns numbers in the assembly. The system of six representatives from each of the 18 parliamentary constituencies has been portrayed as a bribe or a sop to small parties, but such a sop could have been contrived much more effectively. We want as many aspects of political life in Northern Ireland as possible to be represented in the assembly in a broad democratic process; we want inclusivity. There is no sinister motive and there has been no bribery to make small parties sign up.

My second point relates to substitution for vacancies, about which there has been considerable debate. As the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has said, in a proportional representation system it is more just in democratic terms to have a replacement process rather than an elective process to fill a vacancy. In any PR electoral system, the majority party would always win

[Mr. McGrady]

a single by-election, which would deny the system's proportionality. It is logical to make arrangements that presume that parties will negotiate and agree to fill vacancies by means other than the election of a single replacement in one constituency.

I affirm once again that the Bill will enable the people of Northern Ireland to have an election—what is wrong with that?—and to establish an assembly, which I hope and pray will make arrangements to take us into the next millennium in peace. I cannot for the life of me think of how anyone could object to those two principles. The agreement gives the people of Northern Ireland the authority to express their opinion in a referendum. If it is successful and there is a yes vote, they will have the democratic right to elect people to represent them in the new process.

7.18 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I shall be brief, because I am humbled, as the representative of the Liberal Democrat party, to listen to so many hon. Members who have such experience of the Province and bring to the debate not simply the past two years but a lifetime of work there.

I apologise to the House, and especially to the Secretary of State, for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), who had an accident in the Easter holiday. He sends his best wishes. He has worked hard to try to get to know what is happening within the Province.

I have sat here for the past three hours, and have become increasingly depressed that what was an historic achievement on Good Friday should very quickly begin to descend back into the old partisan situation. I understand fully where the Unionist Members are coming from. I hope that hon. Members will give them the respect they deserve for their views, but equally I hope that Unionist Members will recognise that they are at a pivotal point in the history of Northern Ireland, and that the way in which they conduct themselves and the views they represent are important to the whole peace process.

It was rather sad that Senator Mitchell came in for criticism. His work as chairman has been remarkable. I pay tribute from the Liberal Democrat Benches to him, and to all those people of whatever persuasion who paid such a high price to come to the agreement on Good Friday. I welcome on behalf of the Liberal Democrats the ringing endorsements of the Irish Parliament yesterday for both the peace settlement and the agreement. We should not underestimate how important it is that the relationship with the Republic remains on the level it is, and how important it is that its people endorse whatever happens under the peace settlement.

On Monday, the Liberal Democrats made clear with our leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), our position on the agreement. I whole-heartedly repeat on behalf of the party our congratulations and endorsement of the agreement. We generally welcome the Bill, but we do not believe that it is simply a procedural matter, as it has been portrayed by some hon. Members today. It is more than that. It is an important next step on the road to peace. It has to be recognised as such, and not seen simply as a small piece of enabling legislation.

My family come from Ireland—from Donegal. I have large contingents in Belfast, Donegal and Limerick. On Good Friday, I rang up a number of my family both in Belfast and in parts of Donegal. There was genuine euphoria both from people who were hard-line republicans and from people who were very much committed to another route. They saw the agreement as a real step on the road to peace.

I have been going over and back to the Province and to the Republic all my life. It is sad that, in the past 25 to 30 years, the hassles that my relatives have had to put up with have been typical of what ordinary families—ordinary working people—have had to put up with to bring up their families and further their careers.

We welcome the Bill, because we must not waste the opportunity. I find it bizarre that hon. Members on the Unionist Bench feel that consensus is somehow not to be trusted, and regard the fact that parties support each other across the Floor of the House as a conspiracy. I find that rather sad. The public not only in Northern Ireland but across the whole of the United Kingdom have begun to abhor the adversarial way in which the political system operates. They want to see more consensus.

On the streets of Belfast, one would find that an awful lot of people want consensus from their politicians rather than seeing them constantly try to pick faults with each other. Yes, they want argument, and they want the principles and practice to be put forward, but they also want to see their politicians make progress, not constantly go back into the past.

There are clearly a number of problems with the agreement. They will have to be hammered out and argued through over the months, indeed the years, to come, but it is the implementation of the agreement that raises the real issues. The agreement relies on good will. Without good will, it has no hope. That good will needs to be buoyant, and to be buoyed up as we move towards the referendum. The referendum is the first test of the will of the people and whether they have the good will to carry things forward.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) was right to say in an intervention that only time would show whether this was a good agreement. It is only in the months, the years, the decades, to come, that, if the agreement is part of a process to bring lasting peace, people will look back, despite their opposition, and say that it was a price worth paying.

I disagreed with the shadow Secretary of State when he said that the legislation set up a shadow assembly which did not have the same significance as the assembly to come. I think that it has perhaps even more significance. What happens in shadow organisations for local authorities and the Scottish and Welsh assemblies—the relationships, commitments and working practices that are built up—frames the future. The Bill is extremely important. Yes, it sets up a shadow authority, but it is important that that works, and that we recognise as the House of Commons that it is an important step.

I do not want to keep the House any longer, because hon. Members wish to make their contributions, but I commend the Bill to the House. Liberal Democrats strongly support the Government's approach, and trust that the Bill will have a successful passage this evening.

7.26 pm

Ms Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, and to bring the voice of my constituents here today, but above all it is a joy to see the Bill brought before the House. It is a significant step forward into a new future for people in Northern Ireland.

People in my constituency have a special relationship with the people in Northern Ireland. They have a special reason to share the desire of so many Northern Irish people for a democratic and lasting peace, which this debate represents. The Belfast agreement states:

"It is recognised that victims have a right to remember as well as to contribute to a changed society."

I ask the House to take a moment to remember Tim Parry and Jonathan Ball—two young boys from my constituency. In March 1993, Tim and Jonathan were killed at the hands of the IRA. The IRA had placed bombs in Bridge street in our town centre. The terror of that bombing and the shock and pain of those two deaths had a terrible impact on our local community. The families of Tim and Jonathan still live every day with that pain.

Last month, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State came to Warrington to join the children's families and many other local people. They wanted to remember as well as to look forward. I know that she noticed the grief that many people there still feel. My constituents know that, for the past 30 years, people in Northern Ireland have faced that terror and pain day after day. More than 3,200 people have been killed in those decades. Their families feel the loss, day in and day out.

The agreement clearly states:

"The achievement of a peaceful and just society would be the true memorial to the victims of violence."

That is what I am here to say today on behalf of my constituents. The voice of the victims and the desire of people for peace is being heard in the House this evening, and it will be heard again on 22 May in the referendum. I am confident, because I hear it from my constituents, that the voice will say, "Peace will be a living memorial. We want no more deaths."

My constituents strongly welcome the reaching of an agreement. We in Warrington are already working to play our part and to make a positive contribution to the success of the peace process. We are building an international peace centre, where young people from the north and south of Ireland and the north-west of England can work together in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding. Reconciliation is part of our responsibility in Warrington, in the north-west and in England. We recognise that, and we accept it.

The Bill begins the implementation of the agreement—the implementation of the steps towards a lasting and democratic peace. It is a radical step forward—an assertion of the power of the ballot box over the bullet and the bomb—and it has not come before time. It offers the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity of a new future for which they have all worked. On behalf of my constituents, especially on behalf of Tim and Jonathan's families, I support the process within the Bill wholeheartedly, and I hope that the whole House will do so.

7.30 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): I can remember as a boy sitting at home listening to the coronation of our Queen. I can remember the words coming over the radio: "This is London." I was glad that I belonged to a nation like that. I felt proud that I was a member of that nation. I thought that this was a nation that believed in democracy and law and order, and that it would defend its citizens. Like many other people in Northern Ireland, I felt that we were loyal members of the Union.

Then the IRA and violence came along, and I received a rude awakening, because I discovered that the Government and the people I thought would defend Northern Ireland against terrorism were not prepared to do it. Many men and women in Northern Ireland thought, like me, that they should join the security forces and seek to serve in the fight against terrorism. Many of them gave their lives, but we discovered that successive British Governments did not care tuppence about them, and that, at the end of the day, they were only numbers.

The British Government were not prepared to defeat terrorists. Ministers came to the Dispatch Box and said that terrorists would never succeed, that they would always defend us against terrorism, and that those who murdered and killed would be brought to justice; but, at the end of the day, that was nonsense. At the end of the day, they were more concerned about what Europe thought, about what southern Ireland—the Republic of Ireland—thought, and about what America thought. They were far more concerned about that than about the people of Northern Ireland. When the Government found that they were under all that pressure and discovered that they had not the will to defeat terrorism, at the end of the day they negotiated with the terrorists.

That is what happened in Northern Ireland. The Government failed to defeat terrorism, so they decided to appease the terrorists and to talk to them. What we have seen at Stormont in the past few months has been not a peace process, but an appeasement process. Those who were responsible for terrorism have been rewarded.

We have heard all the arguments about decommissioning, but not one weapon has been decommissioned; we have heard all the arguments about how parties must give a commitment to peace, but no commitment has been given. We now find that those who murdered the people of Northern Ireland will be able to get into an assembly and an executive, and use that position to further their aim of a united Ireland. No matter what the Government say, those are the facts of life.

I have over the years been disappointed in the Conservative party—the party which was supposed to be a Unionist party and the party of law and order, but which started the talks. Because the Conservatives started the process, they cannot say anything against it now it has been completed. That is why we have heard the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), agreeing with it tonight. They started it, so they have to agree with it.

I thought that I was a full citizen of the United Kingdom, but I have discovered in the agreement document that I am no longer a full citizen of the United Kingdom. I find that the Government have conceded the self-determination of the people of all the island of Ireland. That is the reality, albeit that I, for a little while, because it is legitimate, because it is my present wish and because it would be wrong to go against it, will simply be allowed to stay in the United Kingdom.

[Mr. William Thompson]

That is a poor Union. I thought that the Union was a family of people sharing common interests, but I now discover that I shall be treated like a scorned wife and got rid of as soon as possible. The agreement shows that the Secretary of State, whoever that will be, will look at every election and dissect every poll so as to determine, as quickly as possible, whether a referendum can be held to put me out of the United Kingdom. That is the situation we face as a result of the agreement.

I am glad that I had nothing to do with the agreement. I am glad to see that the majority of Members of Parliament for the Ulster Unionist party will vote no in the referendum, as will a majority of Unionist Members of Parliament of all parties. Not only that, but I am glad that the Secretary of State has done a good thing in sending the document to every person and home in Northern Ireland—

Mr. Beggs: Almost every one.

Mr. Thompson:—almost every one. The more they read the document, the more they see how little the United Kingdom is mentioned in it, and the more they see how green the document is, the less easily they will be persuaded to vote yes in the referendum.

I trust that the day will come when the people of this land and the Members of this Parliament will recognise that they will never get peace in Northern Ireland through such stupidity. Governments have been trying this sort of stupidity for 25 years, and every time it has been a failure. There is only one way to get peace in Northern Ireland, and that is, first, to treat every citizen of Northern Ireland as an equal citizen within the United Kingdom, and, secondly, to defeat terrorism, wherever it comes from—

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Including the Loyalist Volunteer Force.

Mr. Beggs: Yes, the LVF, too.

Mr. Thompson: Whether it comes from the LVF, the UVF, the UDF any other "F", it is only by defeating terrorism that we will ever have peace in Northern Ireland—when those who have bombs and bullets no longer have the capability to use them to kill and maim.

Last week, the president of Sinn Fein thanked the IRA for its contribution to the peace process. He said: "This is but a phase; it is but another step towards our ultimate aim of a united Ireland." Now this document puts the IRA in power, and enables its members to continue to pursue their devious paths to take Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom. I hope that that aim will be defeated, and that the people of Northern Ireland will again profess that they are full citizens of the United Kingdom, not second-class citizens.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I speak as someone who grew up in Ulster and wants to support the Union. Do you not realise that comments such as those that were made earlier, and that you are making, do more to undermine the Union than the actions of Sinn Fein? Such comments will undermine support for the Union. You are being counter-productive. You will not achieve the objective that you have set yourself. You are doing the people of Northern Ireland a disservice.

Mr. Thompson: I do not like being compared to Sinn Fein. I am a democrat. I believe in the ballot box, and I shall accept the results of the ballot box and seek to change the result democratically if I do not like it. I am not involved in terrorism or ticking bombs. I am not trying to get my way by violent means.

7.41 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I suspect that whatever is said here today by the very few Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland will be futile, in the sense that it will not alter a full stop or comma in the proposed legislation. However, I believe that people should appreciate that the agreement is the product of terror. Terror and terrorist violence produced the policy change that led the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) to say, in January 1991, that Britain no longer had any selfish economic or strategic reason or interest for staying in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: No. I shall give way in due course. I am simply saying that that was the start of a policy change.

I listened to the touching speech by the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth). She is right about the bomb in Warrington, because that year two bombs, albeit of very different kinds, had a dramatic effect in developing the Conservative Government's policy: the bomb at Warrington and the bomb at the Baltic exchange.

For 25 years, Northern Ireland was a place apart within the United Kingdom. It was a place where terror could be encapsulated in some sort of safety net that, by and large—there were exceptions—protected the rest of the United Kingdom from the level and degree of violence that saturated Northern Ireland.

Bombs like that at Warrington were two a penny in Northern Ireland; they happened regularly. That is not to suggest that the bomb at Warrington was any less poignant than some of the bombs that took many more lives—including those of young children—in Northern Ireland. However, the bomb at Warrington, like the bomb in the Baltic exchange, was on the British mainland. It was not a place to which terrorists could be sent back in an internal exile process—British citizens, sent back to a part of the United Kingdom because that was where wicked terrorists should properly be kept.

Prevention of terrorism legislation was largely for keeping terror in Northern Ireland. As the late Reginald Maudling once said, for 25 years a level of violence, in human and economic terms, was acceptable in Northern Ireland because the British Treasury and the British public could take it—because, after all, these people, these Ulster Defence Regiment men and Royal Ulster Constabulary men, were being murdered in a strange part of the United Kingdom—indeed, a part of the United Kingdom that many citizens of the mainland did not even fully appreciate was part of the United Kingdom.

For reasons that I have given, those two bombs—at Warrington and the Baltic exchange—changed all that. The bomb at the Baltic exchange is said to have cost more than all the damages paid out in Northern Ireland for death, personal injury and property between 1969 and 1992. Violence had reached a level on the British mainland that was, in economic and human terms, à la Warrington, unacceptable for first-class British citizens living on the main land.

Mr. Winnick: I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will not forget for a moment the 25 people who were butchered in Birmingham, near my constituency, in November 1974. I do not for a moment wish to minimise the violence inflicted on the people of both communities in Northern Ireland—far from it—and I have condemned it on every occasion, but I hope that he will not give the impression that the violence in the United Kingdom started from the terrible tragedies in Warrington and the Baltic exchange. Remember what happened in Birmingham.

Mr. McCartney: I take the hon. Gentleman's point entirely. Indeed, he will recall that I said that the violence was essentially in, but was certainly not confined to, Northern Ireland. However, we are talking about 3,200 dead in Northern Ireland. I entirely accept that 27 in Birmingham was a terrible atrocity. We are talking about 299 members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary—279 of them murdered by the IRA and 11 by associated republican terrorist organisations.

Ms Southworth: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree with my constituents that the time has come to move on, and move forward toward a peaceful settlement?

Mr. McCartney: I think that is a very lofty sentiment, which many people would endorse; but somewhat facile expressions of emotional sentimentality, while perfectly legitimate, do not answer the question in Northern Ireland.

This agreement permits terrorists who have carried out outrageous crimes against humanity in Northern Ireland to be released within two years. It permits those same terrorists to retain every ounce of Semtex and every gun. It does not require any party representing those paramilitary groups to do anything more than

"use any influence they may"—

"may"; my emphasis—

"have"

to persuade those groups to give up their guns.

No one who has lived in Northern Ireland and who is intimately familiar with the IRA believes for a second, at any time, that a single gun or a single ounce of Semtex will be decommissioned until the IRA has obtained its ultimate objective of a united Ireland.

I object to the immorality and the injustice that has been done by the release of prisoners in the service of nothing but political expediency. I object to the suggestion that victims can be palmed off with kind words and the promise of a possible memorial in Londonderry. I think that that debases and diminishes their suffering.

It is very easy to travel lightly over another man's wound. It is easy for Members of this House of Commons to say, "Let us put the past behind us." Will it be easy for members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who have given their limbs and their lives in order to place dedicated terrorists behind bars, to see them walking the streets?

Is it justice that those former terrorists may become members of a community police force? I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have read the agreement carefully. I have also listened to the claims of representatives of Sinn Fein; to Mr. Durkin, who is a senior figure in the SDLP; and to Dr. Garrett Fitzgerald, a former Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland. They have all stated that former terrorists will be eligible to serve in some form of acceptable community police service for Northern Ireland. They may all be wrong, but that is the position.

The police force in Northern Ireland is being demoralised by the early release of people that they have risked their lives to put out of society. They will see them walking the streets and possibly operating in a police force, while they see their own forces demoralised—all for the price of an agreement.

After the treaty of Utrecht, the first British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, said:

"They now ring the bells, but they will soon wring their hands."

That was the case. We forget the euphoria that greeted Neville Chamberlain in 1938. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) smiles and laughs, but the same sort of euphoria greeted Mr. Chamberlain. People hung out of the windows and cheered because he had the infamous piece of paper that would prevent bombs from falling on London.

This agreement may be a little longer, but it might be no more substantial in preventing the IRA from returning to London and to places such as Canary Wharf, Hammersmith bridge and Heathrow airport when it decides that the political process has, for the present, nothing further to offer it.

I am always amused to some extent when hon. Members who are among the greatest peripatetics in Northern Ireland stand up and tell the House what the people of Northern Ireland want—what their feelings and desires are. I have lived in Northern Ireland, raised a family and carried on a profession in Northern Ireland for 62 years. My understanding and my feelings about what the people of Northern Ireland want bear very little relation to what casual visitors tell me are the feelings of the people of Northern Ireland.

I object to a process whereby, as shadow Secretary of State, the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland visited the Maze prison on 16 October 1996 and met two people she did not know: Michael and Johnny. She then told a press conference that Michael and Johnny were two of the unsung heroes of the peace process. Guess who Michael and Johnny turned out to be? Johnny was Johnny Adair, who was doing 16 years for organising up to 20 murders of Catholics; and Michael was Michael Stone, another loyalist psychopath. He went to the Milltown cemetery equipped with several revolvers and bombs, and murdered three or four Catholics and wounded many others. He was described as an unsung hero of the peace process.

We now know why those unsung heroes were so much in favour of the peace process—because they were induced and bribed to support it by the promise of early release. Once they are out of prison, they will return to a

[Mr. McCartney]

life that is depicted on the murals in the H blocks, which say, "The only good Catholic is a dead Taig." We are told that those people, upon their release, will say, "I'm finished with violence, and I won't join in any more." If the House believes that, it will believe anything.

Let me say in closing that I am not opposed to peace. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members may snigger. However, I am opposed to a process and an agreement that I really believe will create in Northern Ireland a state in transit. States in transit all over the world, from Yugoslavia to Lebanon, provide a field day for warring paramilitary groups, who exploit and inflame the communities they claim to represent. I fear that that will be the ultimate legacy of this peace about which there has been so much euphoria, hype and hysteria.

7.55 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I shall be brief. All hon. Members must welcome steps towards peace—several hon. Members have spoken about that—but it is reasonable that people should have questions about it. I support elections and I support the agreement in principle, but we must ask whether we should look for peace at any price. It is important that we do not. If this peace agreement is to work, it must be built on firm foundations, not on sand.

Senator Mitchell should be congratulated and thanked for his work. Can the House recall his principles? I shall remind hon. Members of them. They state:

"Accordingly, we recommend that the parties to such negotiations affirm their total and absolute commitment to"—

among other things—

"the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations . . . To urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions."

It is painfully obvious that there has been no disarmament and that punishment killings and beatings continue. We should remember that the UDP was expelled briefly from the talks because of its involvement in killings. Earlier this year, Sinn Fein was expelled from the talks for three weeks because of its association with two killings. Three weeks' expulsion from the talks for two lives seems a little cheap. Punishment beatings continue on both sides, but particularly from the IRA. The police and Ministers know that the IRA has been heavily involved in such beatings throughout the talks. Are we being honest? Are the foundations of this agreement firm?

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) started the process of discussions in 1993, we talked about decommissioning all weapons before terrorists would be admitted to the talks. That condition was then reduced to some weapons as a guarantee of good faith. No weapons have been handed in so far, and the talks have finished. We are voting today on elections in Northern Ireland. Do we expect to see weapons handed in immediately after those elections? When will the decommissioning process begin?

We have heard that IRA murderers and other prisoners will be set free. We must ask what message that sends to those who intend to continue with terrorism—because some may. We must remember that they are not political prisoners: they are criminals, gangsters, hoodlums, extortionists, racketeers and drug dealers. They are rightly sentenced, and every hon. Member has condemned the crimes with which they are associated. What conditions will be imposed upon them, and will they be enforced? Must weapons be surrendered before they are released?

We should mention the victims, as the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) did. Both sides—the IRA and the loyalist terrorists—are rather rich from their drug running, criminal activities, extortion, protection rackets and so on. We might expect some evidence of good faith from them: perhaps they should put some of the proceeds towards compensation. That may be a vain thought, but I voice it nevertheless.

Over the past 30 years, the peace, such as it has been, has been maintained by the security forces, both the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the armed forces. I served out there with the armed forces. I do not say that the armed forces were perfect. I served with the RUC. The RUC would certainly not say that we were perfect either, because we had some pretty ding-dong battles or disagreements. I would not say that members of the RUC were perfect, but I would say that they were mostly pretty good. I would say that they were very brave. I would particularly say that the Catholics in the RUC were outstandingly brave, as they, above all others, had to move house and often suffered family separations because of their standing in the RUC.

I know that there is to be a commission on policing for Northern Ireland. I wonder why. I ask Ministers to refer to their own press notice of 7 April, which quotes from a digest of information on the Northern Ireland criminal justice system. It states:

"More than half of all respondents reported that they thought there were too few Catholics in the police force."

We would all agree with that. It continues:

"The main reason given for this by Catholic respondents was that Catholics would not join because they 'fear intimidation or attack on themselves or their relatives.'"

Why do we need a commission? We already know why there are so few Catholics in the RUC, and we regret it. That report stands by itself.

I was taught at school never to pay danegeld. There is no real and tangible movement yet by terrorist organisations. No weapons have been surrendered, and punishment beatings and murders continue. I wish the agreement well and I support elections, but if the agreement is built on sand, I fear that we may all rue the day that we pass it.

8.1 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I am mindful of the time and of the fact that under the timetable motion the vote will be taken in 12 minutes' time. I know also that the Minister wants a reasonable time to answer many of the points that have been raised in the debate, so I shall be brief.

I reiterate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). Opposition Members welcome the agreement and congratulate all those who have brought the negotiations to the present position. We believe, as the Prime Minister suggested this afternoon, that this is a stage in a process and that there is still a long way to go before we can say that the Government and all those involved have achieved a binding peace settlement.

We were grateful for the Minister's reference to the triple lock. Can he give the House an assurance again this evening that he can foresee no circumstances in which that triple lock could be broken? If the present agreement fails, the Government of the Republic of Ireland and the British Government may consider it necessary to present other proposals that may go outside the triple lock agreement.

In his opening remarks, the Minister mentioned that this was the first of two Bills. It is our understanding that the prisoner issue requires primary legislation. Do his comments mean that the prisoner issue will be incorporated in the constitutional Bill to which he referred, which may come before the House in the next Session?

Two crucial issues were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell relating to assurances in the Prime Minister's letter, which has been placed in the Library. They primarily refer to paragraph 25 of strand 1 of the agreement, which deals with the means of removing Ministers and people in office from the assembly. The Prime Minister's letter states:

"This letter is to let you know that if, during the course of the first six months of the shadow Assembly or the Assembly itself, these provisions have been shown to be ineffective, we will support changes to these provisions to enable them to be made properly effective in preventing such people from holding office."

The words

"we will support changes to these provisions"

are somewhat ambiguous. Can the Minister clarify whether legislation brought before the House, perhaps in the constitutional Bill to which he referred, could make changes to implement those ideas, and that we do not have to rely exclusively on legislation emanating from the new assembly to make those changes? The wording is ambiguous and it would help enormously if the matter could be clarified.

On decommissioning, the letter goes on to say that

"the process of decommissioning should begin straight away."

Can the Minister give the House some assurance that relevant measures have started? If not, when will they start? Can we have further details about how those are being informed?

8.5 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy: With the leave of the House, I shall do my best to answer some of the points that have been made in the debate.

The shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), raised several issues. The letter to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was placed in the Library of the House this afternoon.

We will deal with decommissioning and the holding of office, which was raised by several hon. Members, in Committee later this evening. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered some points made by the Leader of the Opposition today. He referred to the fact that decommissioning is an indispensable part of the agreement. In answer to the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) on the apparatus for decommissioning, there is no obstacle in the way of decommissioning. The legal technicalities are in place, the schemes in place, and it is up to the organisations that hold illegal arms to decommission them.

This afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to the fact that the right to hold office is a matter for the assembly, within its code of conduct and Standing Orders. There are aspects of the agreement that deal specifically with that. My right hon. Friend said that he would review the matter in six months' time. I shall return to the subject later this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made an exceptionally powerful speech. He referred to unity of purpose within the new structures. All of us would pay tribute to him for his valuable contribution over two years in the talks.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) referred to numbers in the assembly and the electoral system. My only answer is that those issues were specifically dealt with in the agreement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently reviewing electoral fraud as a result of evidence given to her by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and the forum committee, which did good work on the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) spoke of the filling of vacancies by by-elections or substitution. That, as I said earlier, is a matter for consultation with the parties. The Bill allows for the Secretary of State to take into account the result of that consultation.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to decommissioning and the powers of the Secretary of State. They will be dealt with later, in Committee.

The House will agree with the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) in condemning the recent murders that have taken place. Again, the filling of vacancies will be a matter for consultation. I agree with him on numbers and the new assembly. I also agree that the assembly will successfully fill the democratic deficit.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) raised various interesting points. I wish the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) well and hope to see him soon in the House. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the three independent chairmen did excellent work in the talks, which would not have succeeded without them. I agree, too, that the Bill is not an unimportant issue and that it paves the way for local democracy.

In a moving speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) reminded us about the victims of violence, especially in Britain but also in the rest of the United Kingdom. We all listened with great interest to the tribute that she paid to the people in her constituency.

I did not agree with anything that the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) said, but in the referendum the people of Northern Ireland will make up their minds about the matters to which he referred.

I did not agree with much that the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) said. I accept that he has lived in Northern Ireland all his life and practised there as a barrister, but it is for the women and men of Northern Ireland to decide on 22 May what they think of the agreement.

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) referred to the agreement in not particularly glowing terms. I believe that he thinks sincerely that peace should come about in

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

Northern Ireland, but he has some doubts about the agreement. The agreement was the work of the parties in the talks process, not only the two Governments. We have to accept that the referendum is the time that will tell.

Finally, I can assure the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) that there will be a separate Bill for the release of prisoners issue. I agree that there is a long way to go before there is a firm settlement. I agree also that, ultimately, the triple lock must be put into effect. There can be no imposition on the people of Northern Ireland, but the parties have decided, the House will decide later tonight and the referendum is to take place on 22 May. I believe that there will be a resounding yes to the agreement from the people of Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Committee of the whole House, pursuant to Order [this day].

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to Order [this day].

NORTHERN IRELAND (ELECTIONS) BILL
[MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any costs incurred by a government department in relation to the election to the New Northern Ireland Assembly or the filling of vacancies.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill

Considered in Committee, pursuant to Order [this day].

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

THE ASSEMBLY

8.11 pm

Mr. William Ross: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 13, leave out '108' and insert '90'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 24, in page 1, line 13, leave out '108' and insert '54'.

No. 25, in page 1, leave out line 18 and insert—

'(5) Northern Ireland shall be divided into nine constituencies created by amalgamating two joining parliamentary constituencies and each of these nine constituencies shall return six members.'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 18, leave out 'six' and insert 'five'.

Mr. Ross: The amendments bring to the attention of the Committee the number of Members that should comprise the assembly. The amendments fall into two groups and I hope that it will be understood that amendments Nos. 3 and 4 go together, as do Nos. 24 and 25. I hope, Mr. Lord, that you will permit two separate Divisions when we come to the end of the debate on the amendments. They set out alternative ways of creating what I think would be more reasonable numbers for the Northern Ireland assembly.

Amendment No. 3 would reduce to 90 the total number of Members, and the means of doing that is set out in amendment No. 4, which provides that instead of having six Members per parliamentary constituency we should have only five, which would give a total of 90.

Over many years—since the single transferable vote system of elections was introduced in Northern Ireland—five has been about the representation in every constituency. It is argued that if representation is less than five, we do not have a fair spread. If there is very much more than five, we end up with such a wide variety of representatives that folk with less than one seventh of the vote will be elected. The elected body could find itself at the mercy of a tiny minority of people who were elected late in the counts in the proportional STV system. Four or five have therefore been the preferred numbers for each constituency.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) is able to catch your eye, Mr. Lord, he will detail the consequences of my analysis in the context of Scotland and Wales. It is obvious that representation in Northern Ireland is far higher per head of population than it is in Scotland or Wales. Given that Scotland has a full-blown legislative majority rule system, if it can handle that system with a relatively small number of Members, there is no good reason—the same goes for Wales—for having 108 Members in Northern Ireland.

I have grave concerns about having 90 Members. For an efficient and sensible assembly in Northern Ireland, 90 Members is far too many.

Amendments Nos. 24 and 25 would reduce representation from 108 to 54. To achieve a fairer spread across the community, the amendments would tie each two adjoining parliamentary constituencies together, thereby creating nine electoral areas with six Members per area, giving a total of 54. I would be happy with only five per area, but others have said that there should be six. That would be closer to the number of Members who sat in the old Stormont parliamentary system. I think that 52 Members were elected to Stormont. They were able to operate in a perfectly satisfactory fashion, given the powers that they had, which were much more extensive than those that the new assembly will ever have.

No one has told us what sort of salaries and allowances will be paid to the proposed 108 Members. I see no good reason for expending moneys on 108 when we could have half that number being paid more than would be paid to 108, with better back-up and secretarial allowances so that they could operate properly within the Northern Ireland context.

I have set out the reasoning behind the two sets of amendments. If the Minister says that the Government will be happy with 90 Members, I shall be reasonably content. If the Minister says that 54 would be a much better number, I shall be very happy. I think that 54 Members would be reasonable representation. Wales, with a much larger electorate, has 60 Members. Scotland, with a vastly larger electorate, has 129. Why should Northern Ireland have so many Members? There is no good reason for it.

I have great pleasure in proposing the amendments. I express the sincere hope that the Government will accept reason on this issue, if on no other, so that we might arrive at a far more sensible and better arrangement for the government of Northern Ireland and for the operation of the elected body within it.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I fear that I must recommend that the Committee reject the amendments.

I understand what the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) is saying about Wales and Scotland—Wales with 60 Members and Scotland with 129 although they both have larger populations. The Government did not decide that there should be 108 Members. It was the agreement that resulted in that number. During the strand 1 negotiations and talks, which I had the privilege of chairing, and which continued for many months, numbers was a matter of considerable concern. Other parties in the talks wanted a different system of election altogether. Some wanted the additional member system while others wanted a list system. In the end, the talks came to the conclusion that the best system to use was the single transferable vote, because it had been tried and tested in Northern Ireland.

In addition, the participants in the talks believed that by having six instead of five Members there was an opportunity for greater inclusivity in the assembly when it was elected. I must remind the hon. Gentleman that the leader of his party, with the leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour party and other parties in the talks, were in agreement with that. For that reason, I fear that I must ask the Committee to reject the amendments.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I understand the Minister's point but I share the views of our friend the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) when he spoke earlier about federalism. I happen to believe in federalism and I have argued for it for a good many years.

This is one of the opportunities that we have as a Parliament to come to a decision. Surely one of the duties of Parliament is to vote supply, which involves the public purse.

I have listened to the arguments. I understand why people had to accept some provisions in the agreement, but something is out of kilter. If we go for 108 Members, there would be one for every 10,900 of the electorate. In Scotland, the ratio is one to 30,613 and in Wales it is one to 36,717. Until the English regions start to develop, England has, on average, one hon. Member for every 69,000 people. In the early days, we debated what would be necessary for committee responsibility and proper coverage throughout the Province, and it was decided that 90 would be sufficient.

I understand the reasoning for 54 Members. I was involved in many discussions over the years that resulted in our going for a unicameral system rather than for one with a Commons and a Senate. If my memory is correct, the old Northern Ireland Parliament had 52 Members in the Commons and 26 in the Senate. To deal with the changing political pattern it was decided to go for a membership of 90, but I am not convinced that broadening the scope will help good governance. It will certainly add pressure to public finances, so in future I do not want to hear any hon. Member complaining about subventions to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the large figure of 108 Members is giving rise in local government in Northern Ireland to the feeling that meaningful powers may not be transferred to it?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I picked up some vibrations from not being invited to the assembly or to engage in the forum talks, but, being the party's Chief Whip and representing its interests here. I remained in touch with what was going on. The Minister was correct when he said that discussions were taking place. To the best of my knowledge, most of the later discussions resulted in a compromise from 118 to 108 Members. There is some speculation about whether that is to keep people happy or whether a journalist is producing figures to entice other journalists to stand. Media reports suggest that each Member of the Assembly will receive a salary of £32,000 to £38,000. We have not had official figures. If those figures are correct, councils will think that the Government's commitment to giving powers to them will be set aside.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Before I call the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), I should point out that it is not normal for one hon. Member to move two amendments that are entirely different. I propose to put the Question on amendment No. 3 and it will be up to the hon. Gentleman to decide whether he wants to press it to a vote.

Mr. Ross: It was remiss of me not to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) to move the second group of amendments. I am greatly attracted to a provision for 54 Members because

[Mr. Ross]

that would add to their status. My hon. Friend gave some figures. If there were 90 Members, each one would represent an average of just over 13,000 people. If there were 54, the average would be 21,814, which is still well below the averages for Scotland and Wales. Any rational, logical examination shows no good reason for that vast disparity.

If we applied the Scottish figures there would be 38 Members of the Assembly; application of the Welsh figures would result in 32 Members. Those figures are probably too low, but 50, 54 or 55 seem sensible and reasonable. The Government are not prepared to accept that, but I cannot accept the Minister's explanation. The law is not made by an elected body in Belfast. This country's law is supposed to be made in this Chamber, which is where it should be made.

I see no good reason to go well over the top with such a huge number of people. It is quite unrealistic, unless of course it is for some other reason. On Second Reading, I gave what I thought was the real reason; I said that the only possible reason for going down this road is to ensure the election of representatives of murder and terror organisations. That is unacceptable to any decent man or woman.

For me, the issue contains not only the question of reasonableness but the questions of principle, honour and decency for ordinary men and women. We should not bend the rules to get murderers or representatives of terrorism elected. It is clear that the threat is, "If you do not provide a system that will allow us to get elected, we will go back to the gun and the bullet and the things that we do best." If the Minister wants to live with the immorality, or perhaps the amorality, of the Government's proposals, on his head be it. I certainly cannot go along with them.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 274.

Division No. 252] **[8.26 pm**

AYES

Forsythe, Clifford
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Thompson, William
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Rev. Martin Smyth and
Mr. Roy Beggs.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Horne Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie

Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

THE ELECTION

Mr. William Ross: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 1, line 25, leave out 'local' and insert 'Parliamentary'.

This is a probing amendment. I am curious to know why the Government want to use the local rather than the parliamentary electoral roll for this purpose. I am sure that there is a good reason, but it is not immediately apparent to me. I assume that some people are on one register but not on the other. What is the precise reason for using the register of local electors rather than the electoral register used for parliamentary elections? Will the Minister elucidate that point?

Mr. Paul Murphy: The first reason is that the franchise reflects that which will be used for the Scottish Parliament. The second reason is that nine members of the House of Lords will be able to vote and we should not deny them that opportunity in Northern Ireland. The third reason is that it gives European Union citizens the right to vote in these elections. But the main reason is that it puts us on a level playing field with the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Mackinlay: I fully accept what my hon. Friend says, but he or the electoral officer needs to emphasise a note of caution throughout Northern Ireland. Some people on the electoral roll will have votes in a number of places, as indeed some hon. Members have: they have votes in Westminster and in their residential constituencies. We must avoid people—through not malice, but ignorance of the law—foolishly and wrongly exercising their vote on two occasions on the one day. That should be taken on board. Will that not be facilitated by this measure?

Mr. Murphy: I take into account the point that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Ross: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. William Ross: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 2, leave out lines 12 and 13.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 7, in page 2, leave out lines 15 and 16.

No. 8, in page 2, leave out line 17.

No. 9, in page 2, line 17, at end insert

'which for the initial election shall be £500.00.'.

Mr. Ross: These are, to some extent, probing amendments. Amendment No. 9 tries to introduce a £500 deposit. The Government may wish to introduce a deposit level in regulations rather than in the Bill. If so, I would be perfectly content with that, but perhaps we could be told what sort of sum the Government are thinking about.

On amendment No. 22, the Bill states:

"(5) The Secretary of State may by order make provision about the election or any matter relating to it.

(6) In particular, an order may—

(a) provide for an alteration made after a specified date in a register of local electors to be disregarded;

(b) make provision about deposits",

which I have already covered. I am concerned about subsections (5) and (6)(a).

I want to know exactly what the Government are thinking of in writing subsection (5) into the Bill. I am sure that there must be some good reason for it. The Government seem to be taking fairly wide powers to themselves in this matter. They are talking about making provision about not only the election but

"any matter relating to it."

Is that the point at which the Government will examine identification of electors, given the absolute scandal of the election fraud which may have caused the loss of one seat to the Democratic Unionist party at the last general election? This is a serious issue.

If the Government are thinking of making some provision in regard to electoral fraud and to people voting more than once, which troubles the hon. Member for

[Mr. Ross]

Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), the Minister should tell the Committee exactly what is being done to combat electoral fraud and to ensure that the electoral process is honest, because IRA-Sinn Fein are not in the slightest worried about complying with UK electoral law; they are out to break it in every way they can. That being so, we should be told whether the Government are thinking of other means of identification for both the assembly and the referendum.

We have not yet been told anything about how people will be identified in either of the electoral turnouts. We need to know, because the parties will want to have a clear idea of what they will be expected to do in the run-up to the assembly elections and, indeed, to the referendum. Therefore, as the Government are taking this very wide power to make provision about the election and

"any matter relating to it"—

it is not just some matters—perhaps we can be told exactly what is intended.

Subsection (6)(a) says that an order may

"provide for an alteration made after a specified date in a register of local electors to be disregarded".

There is a cut-off date whereby a name can be placed on the electoral register. I am one of those folk who have always taken a fairly black-and-white view of the electoral register. As the Minister and the Committee will know, the register is compiled using electors' place of residence on 15 September in Northern Ireland and 10 October in Great Britain. That extra month in Northern Ireland gives the parties, the chief electoral officer and his deputies an opportunity to investigate those claiming the right to cast their ballot in elections in Northern Ireland. I welcome that.

I would be happy if the date of 15 September applied to Great Britain as well as to Northern Ireland. A date of 10 October creates a huge problem on this side of the Irish sea, as students return to university and are registered both at home and at university. A 15 September date would probably mean that 90 per cent. of those students would be at home and registered at home. A whole series of problems would then disappear overnight. I have made that point a number of times to the Home Office, but so far—

8.45 pm

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there has been a continuous registration process for a number of years, which allows people to enter their names on the register after 15 September. I assume that that still applies. Does that materially affect the hon. Gentleman's argument?

Mr. Ross: That procedure merely helps those who have been left off the register, perhaps because they did not get the household form. Someone who moves from one district to another cannot be registered in the new district. People are always registered at the address they were at on 15 September. I have a nagging worry about the continuous registration process, but it is the law and I suppose that I can live with it.

The hon. Gentleman and his party will know from personal experience that not many people avail themselves of the process, because not that many people check the register to see whether they are registered. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that they have been checking over the past fortnight. A number of my constituents have telephoned me to complain bitterly that they cannot get through to the chief electoral officer, who is handling the postal ballots rather than having them handled at local level. That is wrong. The people at local level are perfectly capable of handling applications for postal or proxy votes.

My constituents have tried to ring Belfast, but the place is snowed under. Indeed, it has been snowed under for days. There is no point in the chief electoral officer saying, "We have taken X number of phone calls." He does not know how many hundreds of other people have tried to get through, without success, because the lines have been jammed solid. It would have been a much easier process if it had been done at local level. However, that matter does not arise under the amendment; I am merely answering the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon).

Even with the continuous registration system, people have to submit their applications at least two months before the date of an election. I cannot remember the exact time scale, but it is quite long. The number of people who are able to vote, who otherwise would not have been able to do so, is tiny as a proportion of the whole. Whenever an election is due, there is a huge rush of people who suddenly discover that they are not on the register, but they want to vote. They scream at the parties and at the electoral officer, but it is too late. Therefore, it is far easier to defend a date of 15 September. In Northern Ireland—as, I am sure, is the case in Great Britain—each year people have an opportunity to correct the register. It might make the parties and the electoral officer do something if there were obviously a number of empty houses from which cards had not been returned. That problem needs to be addressed.

I hope that we can be given a clear explanation of the reason for the inclusion of subsection (6)(a) and why the Secretary of State is being empowered to

"make provision about the election or any matter relating to it."

We also want to know the position on deposits. I have suggested a figure of £500, but some people may argue for £750 and others for £1,000. I am fairly easy about this, but I want to know the Government's thinking.

Mr. Mallon: I shall deal with one issue touched on by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross)—the allocation and processing of proxy or postal votes by the chief electoral officer.

The chief electoral officer does not seem to have much faith in human nature. The problem with his approach is that it blocks not the people who are abusing the proxy or postal vote system but the genuine applicants. The hon. Member for East Londonderry outlined how one requests a postal vote from the chief electoral officer. The problem has existed for many years. The chief electoral officer is answerable to no one. Election after election, year after year, we have faced an absurd situation. The deputy electoral officers, who in my experience are men of great ability and integrity, have not been allowed to process this important part of the electoral system.

Mr. William Ross: I concur with everything that the hon. Gentleman is saying. At one time, the deputy

electoral officers handled such applications. Because they were closer to the ground, they did a much better job than is done now that the system is centralised. If the experience of the previous general election is anything to go by, centralisation has not been a startling success, to put it mildly.

Mr. Mallon: I agree. It is a matter of common sense, a virtue which not everyone in the chief electoral officer's offices shares. I know that there is great concern about the issue in the various offices. Who knows the local areas better than the local deputy electoral officers? Who knows a scam when they see one better than they? Who can recognise a fiddle better than those operating in the relevant area?

I would welcome a modicum of common sense being instilled in the way in which the chief electoral officer deals not only with his staff but with the population at large and the political parties. We could end up spending thousands of pounds in an effort to get people to exercise their right to vote in the referendum and the election that will follow, while the chief electoral officer's nonsensical approach could in effect disfranchise people making genuine applications.

I shall conclude my remarks by relating an anecdote. Some years ago, when the postal votes were being vetted by the chief electoral officer, the late Harold McCusker, who then represented Upper Bann, and I heard that the officer had turned down an application from a 104-year-old woman on the ground that the application did not specify physical disability. We both knew the lady concerned—she would have been voting for Mr. McCusker, so the application was of no benefit to me. We argued that, irrespective of how the form had been filled in, she should get a postal vote. However, that old lady was not allowed to vote because of the nonsensical system.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall attempt to answer the points raised by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). The Bill refers to the Secretary of State's power to provide for an election by order. That order will be introduced soon and will make provision for matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised, including electoral fraud, a list of absent voters, payment to the returning officer, a candidate's right to send free mail, the secrecy of the ballot and deposits.

The specific provisions in subsection (6) are entirely standard and reflect practice in all electoral legislation. As the hon. Gentleman and others will know, in Northern Ireland an extensive exercise is carried out every year to establish the electoral register. It includes house-to-house canvassing and regular publicised hearings at various points throughout the year at which people who are not on the register can seek to be included on it. They are reasonable provisions and have been in force for some time. Of course when an election is called, a line has to be drawn. The chief electoral officer and his staff cannot be expected to deal with all the work surrounding an election and, at the same time, consider appeals from people who want to be included on the register at the last minute.

I take the points that the hon. Gentleman and others made about electoral fraud. It is particularly important for us to address it in Northern Ireland. As I said earlier, the Select Committee and the committee of the forum have reported on it. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider various proposals in those reports, some of which might be included in the order, depending on their practicality. In respect of deposits, if hon. Members wish to write to me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State with their views on what the level of the deposit should be, I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend takes their suggestions into account when she presents the order to the House later in the parliamentary year.

Mr. William Ross: Although the Minister did not answer all the points that I raised, in the light of what he has said and as it is standard procedure, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

VACANCIES

Mr. Mackinlay: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, leave out lines 21 to 23 and insert—

'(2) An order under subsection (1) above may—

(a) require a seat last filled by a member of a registered party to be filled by another member nominated by that party (without a by-election);

(b) provide for a by-election to be held;

(c) prescribe such other method of filling vacancies as the Secretary of State thinks fit; and different provision (including provision that a vacancy shall not be filled) may be made for different circumstances.

(3) In this section "registered party" means any party registered under any enactment providing for the registration of political parties.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 11, in page 2, line 21, leave out from 'by' to end of line 23 and insert

'the appointment of a substitute chosen by the party to whom the previous occupant of that vacant seat belonged, or was elected as a representative of that party, and where the former representative was an independent the seat shall remain vacant until the following assembly elections.'.

No. 1, in page 2, line 21, leave out 'by-elections or'.

Mr. Mackinlay: Before I advance my arguments for adopting the amendment, which I consider to be superior to what is in the Bill, I should like to make one point that is germane to our detailed examination of legislation. I voted with some reluctance for the guillotine, so I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to explain why the Bill will not be considered by the House of Lords until Monday or Tuesday week. I find that quite breathtaking and worrying. We were told that there is a degree of urgency in our consideration of the legislation in Committee, so we need a good explanation on why it is not moving expeditiously to another place.

Having scuppered my chances of a job in the next reshuffle—I hope—let me explain why the structure of clause 3 is so important. We need to address the way in which vacancies in the assembly are filled, as that matter needs to be handled delicately.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) gave us a good illustration which referred to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). Had the hon. Member for Foyle been elected President of the Irish Republic, as was contemplated at one time, he would have had to vacate his seat in the European Parliament. There would have been a by-election, but it would have been impossible for the SDLP to replace him. Clearly, he would have been replaced by someone of the Unionist persuasion. That problem is writ large if by-elections to the new assembly are held under the proposed electoral system. Whichever tradition commands a majority in a particular constituency would be bound to win, regardless of whether the vacant seat had been held by the Alliance, Sinn Fein, the SDLP, or the DUP. In all probability, the official Unionists would win the seat.

As there will be multi-Member constituencies, I believe that that would be undemocratic. It could also knock the fragile balance of committee seats in the assembly and the distribution of portfolios or number of seats on the Executive; that would be a source of great frustration.

After the assembly has been elected—I shall not take all hon. Members with me on this point—there will, unhappily, be a time of fragility in which it has to build up its procedures and form an Executive. As it prepares to move in that incubation period from being a shadow body to a fully functioning assembly, a by-election could be wholly disruptive.

9 pm

I invite hon. Members to consider a scenario in which the Executive has been set up and—as is in the nature of politics—there are bad times. There could be extreme and, I hope, extraordinary terrorist activity, or some natural disaster, for example. Some people would exploit the opportunity offered by a by-election to create difficulties.

I use as an analogy the Westminster general election of February 1974, which destabilised, and contributed to the demise of, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, which at that stage had had only a few months' life. If the election had not occurred, the Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly might have had a longer run, and the problems that arose—the Ulster workers' strike and so on—might have been avoided. Lord Merlyn-Rees and others who were involved, including the late Brian Faulkner, said that the election came at a bad time, and I believe that by-elections to the New Northern Ireland Assembly could give rise to similarly great problems.

Unlike the Bill, amendment No. 2 would make it clear that there was a presumption that, when a vacancy arose, it would be filled by a member of the political party that previously held the seat. That would help the Secretary of State by removing any ambiguity, so that those people who wanted the political opportunity to fight a by-election for their own selfish reasons would not have any grounds for complaint against her or any future Secretary of State.

The amendment is similar to one tabled by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), in that it would cover cases in which independents, who might have no natural successor, lost their seat or their seat was declared void. It would then allow the Secretary of State—in the nature of things, this would be rare—to call a by-election or to hold the seat vacant.

I do not like the latter option, but, like the hon. Member for Belfast, South, I recognise that a vacancy could occur relating to a seat hitherto held by an independent and we must explore that possibility. The seat could also be held in abeyance until a Westminster general election or a Northern Ireland local government election, for example—those options should also be explored. However, the overwhelming majority of vacancies that will occur will relate to people who were elected on a party ticket—the provisions that deal with other circumstances are highly unlikely to be used.

In the past 24 hours, I have been referring to my library of *Hansards*—I was also studying the *Hansard* reports of the 1973 Northern Ireland Assembly. They should be compulsory reading, as they buttress the argument—I say this in parenthesis—that Standing Orders should be handed down by the Secretary of State rather than formulated by the assembly. The former assembly wasted much time on that.

Tragically, on the eve of the first sitting of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a Unionist Member, Mr. McCarthy, was killed in a car crash and the by-election was never held because, as far as I can ascertain, it was such a short-lived assembly.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The seat, my own constituency of North Antrim, was filled; a DUP man won it.

Mr. Mackinlay: Indeed.

I do not want to press the amendment to a vote. There could be subsequent reshuffles, and I do not want to scupper anything! In the gap between now and the matter being considered in another place, there should be some reflection on this question, on the matter of the Presiding Officer and on one or two other matters. I cannot see why it should not be possible, by agreement—there is agreement—for amendments to be made in another place that could go through on the nod when they come back to the House.

There is a mood in the Chamber for tidying up this measure. It would help the Secretary of State to have an improved Act on the statute book.

Mr. Mallon: I have much sympathy with the amendment and I look forward to hearing the Minister's view on it, but it could run contrary to the whole reason for the proportional system, which is to create a proportional representation within a constituency in an election, and I am strongly in favour of that. A by-election under proportional representation becomes a majority vote election, especially in the Northern Irish context, and the amendment would defeat that purpose.

The amendment also runs contrary to the d'Hondt system in relation to appointments within the assembly. Under that system, if a Minister dies, becomes President of Ireland or is no longer a Minister for some other reason, the post returns to his party. The amendment would create a contradiction with that element of inclusivity.

The proportionality according to which appointments are originally made, be they in cabinets or committees or in the assembly itself, could be changed by the by-election process envisaged in the amendment. To take an extreme example, if a party was on the borderline of having enough of a mandate to have one of its members appointed a Minister under the d'Hondt system, and a

member of the party subsequently died or left, it might then have too few members for that ministerial post. Does the party lose its claim to the post because the element of proportionality has changed?

I know that that is an extreme case, that in normal practice it would not happen and that those who would push it to happen would be very churlish indeed. That points to the contradiction that exists. The problem as regards independence is obvious, but we have to remember that there is no such thing as independence in Northern Irish political life. Some people with strong opinions might label themselves as independents—during the forum elections one of the local newspapers carried a marvellous headline, calling on all independent candidates to unite so that they could present a united voice in the forum. I should have thought that it would have been much easier to join a political party and have done with it, but that points up the difficulties.

Like the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) who moved the amendment, I do not think that it should be pressed to a vote, but I would be interested to find out what the Minister has to say and to hear the reaction to it. He knows that on 2 February the matter was discussed at length in the talks. In fairness, the minute tells us that the discussion was inconclusive.

Mr. Robert McCartney: With his experience as a member of the Senate of the Dail Eireann, can the hon. Gentleman assist us about the position there when there is a by-election, as happened recently in a seat in north Dublin and another in Limerick? The proportional representation system of single transferable vote is, I understand, the same. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us what happened on those occasions and whether a similar system to that suggested in the Bill is applicable there?

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman knows full well the answer to that question. In Dail Eireann there are by-elections. We are dealing with a different system. In Dail Eireann, members of the Government are appointed by the leader of the largest party, which forms the Government, so there is not the proportionality factor either in committees or ministerial positions and that is the essential difference. I take the point, as having a by-election looks more democratic, but, in essence, it runs counter to all the other arrangements.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that that is the essential difference. It is that in Dail Eireann, if the Government lose their majority they go to the country. Perhaps I am wrong, but, as I understand it, we are talking about a fixed-term body. That is the essential difference between the Dail and this House, and what is being proposed in the Bill.

Mr. Mallon: Again, the Government need not necessarily go to the country. One of the most successful Governments in the Republic of Ireland—that led by Sean Lemass—was a minority Government from the day they began until the day they ended, and lasted for the full term. That does not answer the hon. Gentleman's question, however.

The issue was discussed in the talks process and, according to the minutes, was inconclusive, but there is a substantive case for the Government to reconsider the matter, measure it in accordance with the proportional representation system for election and with the d'Hondt system of appointment to committees and Cabinet positions. Having studied it, they might move, hopefully, towards the amendment.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I support the general thrust of the debate. We have considered the matter and recognise some of the issues. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) used the illustration of someone becoming President of Ireland, which, with proportionality, might result in a Sinn Fein candidate moving up. It could be the other way round and involve a Sinn Fein man becoming President of Ireland and an SDLP person going to the assembly.

The question to face is the principles and patterns that have been accepted for the assembly. It was in the light of proportionality that we tabled our amendment. We recognise that if we are to go down that road, there must be some consistency. It was said earlier that the Unionists would be most likely to win, which would be wonderful. The amendment shows that we are not seeking to hog any assembly. The reality is shown by a recent Omagh council by-election. The council swung because, following the death of a Unionist, a Sinn Fein councillor was elected. It could be said that that is democracy at work. In councils, the Dail Eireann or a Parliament such as this, it is possible to wheel and deal so that a party can retain its governmental role, assisted by others. However, in the assembly it is proportionality right through, and I believe that it is incumbent on the Government, especially in the week before the Bill goes to the other place, to think again and make some amendment.

The matter is important for another reason. The amendment would clear the position and leave no ambiguity. If it is left open for a vacancy to be filled by some method chosen by the Secretary of State, whoever that might be, there could be controversy about whether that person had acted judiciously or with bias. If the Bill is clear about how vacancies should be filled, there is no room for further argument.

9.15 pm

Dr. Godman: Despite my respect and affection for my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), I have some reservations about the amendments. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock offered no comparative evidence about where the system that he envisages operates. My hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh was asked about recent by-elections in the Republic, in Limerick and Dublin. As I said earlier, both were won by representatives of the Irish Labour party. I recall another by-election in Dublin where Mr. Joe Higgins almost pulled off a dramatic victory over the issue of water rates. What of the interests of the electors in such a system?

I readily acknowledge the need to take account of the special needs of Northern Ireland and the important question of proportionality. Nowhere are such considerations more evident than in the Knesset. The system there is a disaster, but it is still democratic. All I am saying is that electors in a constituency must have the right to voice their view at a by-election about the conduct of the previous Member, whether he is dead, in prison or whatever, and about the conduct of the party concerned.

[Dr. Godman]

Labour has suffered some remarkable reverses in Scotland. My Scottish friends on the Government Front Bench will recall the Govan by-election, which we lost.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): That is one.

Dr. Godman: There has been more than one; I am talking about our most recent defeat, when we lost to the SNP despite the massive majority Bruce Millan had enjoyed. I have listened carefully to the Minister, but we must give serious consideration to the interests of the electors.

Mr. Mackinlay: My hon. Friend has challenged me to cite an example of such an arrangement. I am open to correction by my hon. Friend, but I have to remind him that we, in this place, in this parliamentary Session, have passed clauses in the European Parliamentary Elections Bill that mean that there will not be any by-elections. So he and I voted for precisely this formula. I assume that he voted for it—if not, he should not have a chance of a Cabinet job either. We all voted for it. That is something that we have taken on board in this parliamentary Session.

If I had done some research, I suppose that I could trot out half a dozen examples. The Australian Senate, which is elected, has a system—by convention admittedly—in which when a vacancy occurs the premier of the state from which the Senator comes nominates someone from the party that held the seat. Even if the premier is a member of the Country party, if the Senate seat was held by the Australian Labour party, he nominates an Australian Labour Senator, no doubt recommended by the leader of the party.

There are plenty of precedents, but the most important is that my hon. Friend and I voted for such arrangements—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is making an intervention.

Dr. Godman: It was an interesting intervention. I do not know where to start replying to it, Mr. Lord. My hon. Friend offered to give me half a dozen examples in an intervention that could hardly be called brief. He gave the Australian Senate as an example. That convention developed over a number of years, as my hon. Friend will acknowledge. It was not introduced in 1901.

Mr. Willis: What about the European Parliamentary Elections Bill?

Dr. Godman: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene?

Mr. Willis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I am sorry for interrupting him from a sedentary position, but the most relevant point that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) made was about the European Parliamentary Elections Bill. We would like the hon. Gentleman to deal with that example.

Dr. Godman: I cannot recall offhand, but I may well have voted for such a system in that Bill. A degree of inconsistency does no one any harm and I have never had any aspirations to higher office. I have answered three of my hon. Friend's questions from his less than brief intervention. He gives us the Australian Senate, where convention was developed over many years. The European Parliament is an entirely different assembly. It has no legislative powers. It cannot be compared sensibly with what we are discussing this evening, which is, a Northern Ireland assembly that may prove to have some characteristics in common with our Scottish Parliament. I would not want to see the type of measure that my hon. Friend advocates introduced into the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. McGrady: My hon. Friend does not have to go outside Northern Ireland to find an example that supports the argument for replacement by party connotation. In local government in Northern Ireland, by agreement within the chamber, vacancies are not filled by proceeding to an election. People are co-opted by party designation. That happens in the vast majority of councils in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Godman: I do not regret getting up to speak, but I am losing friends by the minute here. I am not too happy with the local government example. I should like to see many more powers given to local government in Northern Ireland. I suspect that councillors might have a different view if they had the powers that local authorities in Scotland and elsewhere have.

To address the amendment directly, I have to say that, despite the remarkably fine characteristics of my democratic socialist Friend the Member for Thurrock, it does not address the concerns of the electorate during the lifetime of a Parliament. Despite the problems facing my hon. Friends from Northern Ireland on a daily basis—I am only an occasional visitor to the Six Counties—my view is that we must take account of the interests, aspirations and concerns of the electors. With sincere respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, I do not think that his amendment addresses the problem, which is the democratic rights of the electors themselves.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The amendment deals with one of the Bill's many provisions that demonstrate the degree to which the assembly is to be the puppet of the Secretary of State. Throughout this short piece of legislation, it is abundantly clear that the Secretary of State has the assembly on a choke chain: if it moves in one direction, she hauls it back; if it moves in the other, she hauls it back; if it goes too far forward, she hauls it back; if it does not move fast enough, she kicks it forward. The Secretary of State can refer to the assembly even those matters that are outside the scope of the assembly's authority.

The Secretary of State has the power to make provision for the elections and she effectively has the power to decide who comes in on the foot of any vacancy. There is no provision in the Bill that suggests that the Secretary of State is required to do the same thing in one case as in another. In one case, she might find it politic to hold a by-election—perhaps in that way one of her supporters might get elected. In another case, it might be preferable to allow the vacancy to be filled by a member of the same party as the person who is deceased or has retired. In yet another case, she might find some other method—it is

entirely up to her—of filling that vacancy. That is not remotely a democratic way of dealing with a vacancy, therefore, the amendment fails to address the problem.

Because of the electoral system, there are automatic difficulties and I can well understand the problems mentioned by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). There is bound to be a feeling of injustice if a party manages to get the appropriate quota that allows it one seat out of six, but the person either dies or retires, a vacancy occurs and the party does not get its seat in that area, it is not represented and its voice is not heard.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I ought to intervene on the hon. Gentleman because I think that he has misunderstood the clause. Clause 3 refers to the Secretary of State, by order, laying down the method by which vacancies are to be filled. That would be a general order, which referred to the general principle of how vacancies are to be filled and not to individual vacancies as they occurred. His speech suggests that he is under the impression that the Secretary of State could pick and choose between methods—by-election on one occasion and substitution on another—but that is not the case. When I reply to this debate, I shall explain in more detail what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has in mind on that issue, but I should say now that the clause refers to vacancies in general and to general principles, not to individual cases.

Mr. Robinson: I quite understand that the provision is that the Secretary of State will make an order—but the Secretary of State could make another order. There is nothing in the Bill that suggests that the Secretary of State is not capable of making one order after another, or varying the conditions from one occasion to the next. If it were not so, why does she not put that up front right now? Let her put it on the face of the Bill. The obvious approach would be for her to tell us how a vacancy will be dealt with. I would far rather know right now what the method is to be, even if it was not the method I most preferred, because I would at least know that it would apply in all sets of circumstances.

I can understand the genuine concern that the proportionality in an area will no longer be intact after a vacancy occurs. In the Republic of Ireland, that is dealt with by recognising the fact that opinions can change in a constituency, and that, unless one allows a by-election, in effect one freezes one's electoral body. In this case, one would freeze not only the electoral body, but the form of government within that body. It could never change while the assembly existed. We should remember that the legislation has an indefinite lifespan: it could remain for ever and a day. With the Bill as it stands, Members of the Assembly will be elected without knowing how long their term of office will be; it is not stated.

I believe that it could cause many problems to freeze matters for all time in Northern Ireland by saying that any vacancy should be filled by a member of the party to which the ex-member belonged. Although I believe that the best way of dealing with the problem is by holding a by-election—inadequate though that may be—even if the Government did not go in that direction, I should much prefer that they stated in the Bill how we shall proceed if a vacancy arises.

9.30 pm

Mr. William Ross: We have had an interesting little debate on this issue. My hon. Friends and I tabled amendment No. 11 partly because this issue is not new in Northern Ireland; it has been around since the proportional representation-single transferable vote system was introduced for council elections and for the Northern Ireland body. In some cases, considerable changes in council strengths were made as a result of one or two deaths in a district electoral area, or even in adjoining ones.

The problem has not been resolved. Although Ministers may be unaware of the fact, it is not the first time that I have drawn attention to the problem of by-elections and the replacement of persons who have died or retired under the PR-STV system.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde—

Dr. Godman: Greenock and Inverclyde.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) said that, without holding a by-election, one did not address the concerns of the electorate between elections. However, the difficulty is that, between elections, it would be a first-past-the-post election—or rather, on the exhaustive vote system—whereas the general election, to whatever body, is conducted under the single transferable vote system. For a by-election to be fair, the five or six remaining Members must stand down, and the election must be held for the whole constituency.

People do not take kindly to that, either, but that is the only fair way to find out what the electorate of the area think between general elections. We have to say, "Sorry guys; someone's killed, someone's resigned. The whole body of representation in the constituency is wiped out, so you have to have an election."

Let us be clear in our minds about another thing. One does not know when some poor soul in a sensitive area in Northern Ireland will become a target for a killer. Given the passions that have flowed round that place for years, I sometimes wonder how people—perhaps the only representative of the political view that they hold—have managed to survive. The constant danger is that, sooner or later, someone with gunmen will get round to looking at the politics. I strongly believe that we need to consider that issue with great care.

Dr. Godman: Whatever system is chosen, loose ends will be left untied. There is no perfect system anywhere. I am simply saying that I believe that, in principle, whatever the system, vacancies should be filled by way of by-elections.

Mr. Ross: In general terms, I have no problem with that philosophy. I am saying only that it should be "fair do's" all round—that we should compare like with like, in the by-election as in the general election.

Mr. Mallon: I have a certain attachment to by-elections; had it not been for one, in rather unique circumstances, I should not be here. However, in the last forum election, in the constituency of Newry and Armagh, the Ulster Unionist party won one seat. That was a distortion, because the electoral system was a distorted

[Mr. Mallon]

one, but it was still under proportional representation. Let us assume that—as, thankfully, did not happen—that person had become the President of the Republic of Ireland, which would have been very unlikely. It would have meant that the constituency of Newry and Armagh had no Unionist representative. In the event of a by-election, we would win the seat and the Ulster Unionist party would be totally disfranchised in that constituency.

Mr. Ross: It would be more accurate to say that the Ulster Unionist electorate rather than the Ulster Unionist party would be disfranchised. The Minister will understand by now that there are concerns about this issue that are not tied to this assembly alone. I believe that our problems in this area go beyond the assembly to the entire range of bodies elected by proportional representation. For that reason, I hope that the Government will take on board the points raised in this discussion, and perhaps return on Report or in another place with proposals that might meet with more general approval. I do not deny the arguments made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), who raised concerns that are different from those represented by other hon. Members who have participated in the discussion.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) appeared to argue that the Secretary of State could, by a series of orders, select a variety of means of filling vacancies. I understood the Minister to say that an order would be made stating the general principle upon which each consecutive vacancy would be dealt with thereafter. Is there any reason why the present Bill should not contain words to the effect that the Secretary of State will make an order setting out the consistent principle upon which all vacancies will be filled? That would preserve the Secretary of State's right to fill the vacancy according to a principle that would apply to each and every vacancy. It would also permit the Bill to pass, leaving the detail of the particular method to be selected later, and it would lay to rest fears that there may be a degree of unjust variety in the modes of filling possible vacancies.

Mr. Paul Murphy: This has been a very interesting discussion. It stems from the point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), who referred to the fact that this is unfinished business so far as the talks were concerned. I chaired the meeting when we dealt with the matter. We did not reach a conclusion, and because of that and because it is a particularly important issue—I acknowledge that the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) has raised it before—it is a concern.

There are strong feelings on both sides of the argument. The traditional way of filling parliamentary vacancies in this country is through by-elections. However, in the light of the nature of the electoral system in Northern Ireland and the system that already operates for European parliamentary elections in the Republic of Ireland—it will be introduced in this country as well—we know that we must consider the method of alternates by substitute in order to preserve proportionality.

The Government wish to consult on the matter. The Secretary of State will, by order—it will be a statutory instrument resulting from the Bill—put before the House of Commons the general principles, to which the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) referred, of how we shall fill assembly vacancies. Those principles will be before us very soon. In the meantime, I urge hon. Members—as I urged them regarding the other matter—to write or talk to me or the Secretary of State about their concerns. Parliament will then have the opportunity to address the matter in the context of dealing with orders.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that to avoid all the confusion that might arise and to ensure that the balances and adequate distribution of positions are maintained, right from the beginning, the parties or the independents who are elected should make known the substitute to be appointed in the event of a vacancy arising?

Mr. Murphy: There are complications, even in a system of alternates. An alternate at the beginning of a Session of a Parliament or an assembly might, in the course of the Session, not want to serve any more. What happens then? There are practical difficulties.

There are practical difficulties in the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), with the reference to "party". That implies the definition of party. We would have to examine that further because of the complications surrounding those matters.

The debate has been a good one and all the points have been made. The debate that will accompany the order to be laid before the House will benefit from the arguments that we have heard this evening. I urge hon. Members not to press their amendments, as we shall deal with the matter in the not too distant future.

Mr. Mackinlay: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment. I hope that that meets the mood of the Committee. We still stand a sporting chance.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

DISQUALIFICATION

Mr. Peter Robinson: I beg to move a manuscript amendment, No. 26, in page 2, line 27, at end insert—

'(1A) A person is disqualified for membership of the Assembly if he belongs to a party which—

(a) is attached to a proscribed organisation which is listed in Schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996, and which—

(i) has not declared, and is not presently honouring, a permanent and total cessation of violence; and

(ii) has not surrendered its illegal weaponry; and

(iii) has not dismantled its paramilitary structure, and

(b) has not made an unequivocal decision of its acceptance of the six principles contained in the Report of the International Commission on Decommissioning, which establish a commitment to—

(i)exclusively peaceful means; and

(ii) abide by the democratic process.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss manuscript amendment No. 29, in schedule, page 4, line 13, at end insert—

'3A. No person shall hold any office in the Assembly if he belongs to a party which—

(a) is attached to a proscribed organisation which is listed ion Schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996, and which—

(i) has not declared, and is not presently honouring, a permanent and total cessation of violence; and

(ii) has not surrendered its illegal weaponry; and

(iii) has not dismantled its paramilitary structure, and

(b) has not made an unequivocal declaration of its acceptance of the six principles contained in the Report of the International Commission on Decommissioning, which establish a commitment to—

(i) exclusively peaceful means; and

(ii) abide by the democratic process.'.

Mr. Robinson: I have often moved amendments, with little expectation that they would be accepted by the Government or supported by the House. On no occasion could I be more certain that an amendment would not succeed than on this one. The certainty comes from the fact, which seems to have been missed by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, that the agreement is a multi-party agreement, and a single party cannot change a multi-party agreement. That is the core of the agreement that has been reached.

The essential element of the agreement is that there is to be a buy-off of terrorists. The agreement was set up in order to buy the silence of the IRA's gunners. For that purpose, they were brought into the talks process, throwing aside the rules that were set up. The rules that decommissioning would be required disappeared. The rules that exclusively democratic and peaceful means must be adopted by the parties were tossed aside. The purpose was to engage the Provisional IRA in negotiations and to find out what price it would be willing to accept in return for the silence of its guns and bombs. No price that would entail the IRA being excluded from government would buy the silence of its guns and bombs.

The essential element of the assembly is membership for the Provisional IRA and other terrorist organisations at the very highest level, including Government. The Bill ensures places for Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in the Government of Northern Ireland. Have hon. Members stopped for a moment to think how repulsive that is to the people of Northern Ireland?

I entered politics because a friend of mine was killed in a bomb explosion in the Northern Ireland Electricity headquarters. The person who was in charge of the Provisional IRA who sent the bombers out who killed my friend was Gerald Adams.

I am an alderman in the borough of Castlereagh, where a dozen people were butchered by the Provisional IRA. The man who sent out those responsible for the bombing was Gerald Adams. I could go through atrocity after atrocity in Northern Ireland while Gerald Adams was the commander of the Provisional IRA in Belfast. Now he climbs over the bodies of victims to get into the Government of Northern Ireland. He is supported, sadly, not only by the Government but by the Tory Opposition. He is even supported by some Unionists.

9.45 pm

The people of Northern Ireland, who have suffered the terrorism of these past decades and who refused to give in, no matter what the IRA would do against them, now find that the Government and others are prepared to offer places in government to the Provisional IRA. Not only that, but the Government are prepared to open the gates of the prisons to allow murderers out on to the streets. Is not that a buy-off to the men of violence?

The amendment sets out clearly that there can be no place in government and in the assembly for those who do not accept exclusively peaceful and democratic means of change. The Provisional IRA has not called a permanent cessation of violence. It is still carrying out its punishment beatings, as they are called. It is still shooting and bombing. It is still killing in Northern Ireland. Although it may use the name of convenience of some other organisation, there is still the hand of the Provisional IRA and there is still its stockpile of weapons.

I challenge the Government. If there is not an agreement behind which there is a determination to buy off the Provisional IRA, let the Government accept the amendment. Show us that the Government do not want to give in to terrorists. Show us that only those who are exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic means will get into the assembly and into government. If the Government fail to do that, it will be abundantly clear that they will have men of violence in the assembly and in government. Once they are in government, there is no provision that requires decommissioning to take place in order for those people to remain in government. They can hold on to their weapons and their Ministers can still be in government.

There is even no requirement that the organisation itself should stop its violence. It is the individual who has to be caught with the smoking gun in his hand before that person can be removed from government. If there was any whiff of democracy in this system, it would not allow those who are associated with terrorists to be involved in the government of Northern Ireland or in an assembly for Northern Ireland.

I ask the Committee to support an amendment, if the Government are not prepared to do so, that is common sense. President Clinton tells us that we should accept what he describes as a great step forward, which is the progress of the agreement. Will he open the prison to allow the Oklahoma bomber to get out? Will he find a place in his Administration for him? He would not even dream of it. However, he expects us to do it in the context of Northern Ireland. That is the nonsensical nature of the proposal. It is proposed that those who have carried out acts as atrocious and heinous as any in the whole of this creation should be given places in government as of right. I oppose the proposal and so, I hope, will the Committee.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The amendment contains nothing that is different from the Mitchell principles, to which the men of violence said that they adhered. If we are now saying that we cannot make the Mitchell principles stick as regards those who join the assembly, what are we going to do? Are we to have someone in the assembly, or standing for membership and then getting elected to it, who is not prepared to accept the Mitchell principles? The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), said that he wanted the provision

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

strengthened. The amendment gives the Opposition an opportunity to put their feet in the Lobby. They say, "We agree with you and on another issue we shall vote with you." Now is the time to say, "You cannot get into the assembly unless you declare for the Mitchell principles and are abiding by them." That applies to people on both sides of the fence.

A wall on the road that I go down every day has the inscription, "Paisley wants you to give up your guns." That is how I am treated for telling loyalist people that they should give up their guns. I had to take part in talks with the representatives of people who had signed up to the Mitchell principles but were not abiding by them. The people of Northern Ireland want to know whether Parliament wants such men to continue to hold their guns and use them as a threat.

There will shortly be a band parade in Antrim town. Members of the Progressive Unionist party have gone to the band members and threatened them. They have been told that if they put their band on the road, they will never walk again. That threat has been issued by people who signed up to the Mitchell principles, and the only guilt of the band members is that they want to say no to the agreement. In a referendum, voters are entitled to say no. People may try to persuade them to say yes, and that is their business. If I want to persuade people to say no, that is my business. It is quite wrong to threaten people.

We have visits from members of the security forces that the Minister controls. They come to our houses and tell us, "There is a terrible threat on your life. You will have to mind yourself." Day after day, people in public office are being warned that they might be attacked. How can the people who make such threats be allowed to stand for the assembly and take part in it? There is an amendment about their taking office, but we must first deal with membership: that is all we ask. The Tory party should be honest about its policy.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I support the amendment. It is said that a week is a long time in politics. I think that paragraph 10—I speak from memory—of the Downing street declaration was the origin of much of the process that we are debating. It declared specifically that only those who had permanently eschewed violence as a means of obtaining political objectives should be permitted into dialogue with democratic parties and with the two Governments.

There was some debate about exactly what that meant, and the day after the Downing street declaration, the then Foreign Secretary of the Republic, Mr. Spring, said in Dail Eireann that it meant that there had to be a permanent cessation of violence and the giving up of arms. He specifically stated that Sinn Fein-IRA would not be permitted to enter the democratic process, look around to see what it had to offer, and then, if it did not meet their requirements, go back to what is described as doing what they do best.

Mr. John Bruton, then leader of the main opposition party Fine Gael and subsequently Taoiseach in what was described as the rainbow coalition, made a submission on behalf of his party in which he said that the effect of the Downing street declaration was that arms had to be given up now. "Now" is a very short word: it means immediately, at once, forthwith, without delay.

The British Government stated clearly that there had to be a permanent cessation of violence. Three months after the start of the first ceasefire of 31 August 1994, they assumed it to be permanent. The Irish Government were much more optimistic. Albert Reynolds, the then Taoiseach, said that there was no doubt that that ceasefire was permanent. Indeed, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) berated a television interviewer for having the temerity to suggest that "complete" was not synonymous with "permanent", and that violence could start up all over again after a complete ceasefire.

On 29 August 1995, after reports of a meeting in the west of Ireland attended by the hon. Member for Foyle and representatives of Sinn Fein and the Irish Government, during which it was proposed that there should be no requirement to hand over any amount of arms, the British Government responded by declaring that to admit Sinn Fein into democratic discourse would be undemocratic and unconstitutional.

Paragraph 34 of the Mitchell report produced in January 1996 stated that Sinn Fein and other paramilitaries were required merely to consider the decommissioning of arms in tandem with political progress. The Conservative Government resiled from every position that they had taken on decommissioning, and the present Administration rapidly followed suit. When the talks commenced, the air was alive with declarations and similes about twin tracks, parallel tracks and trains starting at the same time. There were references to decommissioning occurring at the same time as the political talks progressed.

When it was suggested in the House that Sinn Fein would be admitted to the talks, I pointed out that, once in the talks, it would say, "We are a political party with an electoral mandate. We are not Provisional IRA, we have no arms or weapons, and we have nothing to decommission." I argued that Sinn Fein would go from the beginning to the end of the negotiations and obtain the best agreement it could get, without a single ounce of Semtex or a single revolver or other weapon being handed over. One did not need to be a clairvoyant to make such a prophecy, and that is what happened.

During the negotiations, the real issue was pushed aside. The participants were fobbed off with proposals for highly expensive commissions staffed by expert people who, in due course, would do wonderful things about the administration of decommissioning. It was all a complete farce. The dogs in the street knew that there was not the slightest prospect of a single weapon or a single explosive ever being handed over until Sinn Fein's ultimate objectives were achieved.

What do we have under this agreement? It provides that Sinn Fein members can be elected under this proposed assembly, can hold Executive office on the basis of proportionality and can front a paramilitary grouping that has been responsible for the deaths of more than 2,000 people. That is the reality.

10 pm

It is suggested that Sinn Fein has come in like a spy from the cold and embraced the principles of democracy, much as members of the Weimar Republic and General

Schleicher thought in 1933 that they could persuade fascists to assume the mantle of democracy. That is exactly what is happening here.

Mr. Charles Clarke (Norwich, South): That is a stupid argument.

Mr. McCartney: There may be remarks that what I am saying is stupid from the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke)—

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: I am sorry. I do not respond to insult from a sedentary position.

That assumption is not made by me. Every Minister in the Conservative Government—from the then Prime Minister downwards—who had anything whatever to do with the alleged peace process that the Conservative Administration sponsored, have said repeatedly that the connection between Sinn Fein and the IRA is overwhelmingly strong and overwhelmingly positive. They have been described as two faces on the same coin, as two wings on the same bird. It has been established that almost everyone in a position of authority in Sinn Fein has served their terrorist apprenticeship within the ranks of Sinn Fein-IRA.

Mr. Stott: As someone who did not insult the hon. and learned Gentleman from a sedentary position, I am grateful to him for giving way. He is a democratically elected Member of the British Parliament and he makes his points on the Floor of the ancient House of Commons, which he has every right to do. I told him in a private conversation that I was disappointed with him. He is a formidable advocate and he makes his points clearly. Why did he not make all those points in the talks? Why did he absent himself from the talks and stand on the sidelines, instead of making the points that he makes now?

Mr. McCartney: If the point were a good one, it would have been well made. I was in the talks for 14 months. During that period, I can say with modesty that I probably had the best attendance record of any party leader. I certainly attended every plenary session; I think that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), despite our differences, will bear me out.

Mr. Mallon: I am not in a position to confirm in terms of statistics what the attendance record of anyone was, but I will confirm that, when the hon. and learned Gentleman was there, he did give his point of view at great length—at very great length—and with great ingenuity.

Mr. McCartney: I thank the hon. Gentleman—

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Hon. Members should dwell not on attendance records, but on the amendment before us.

Mr. McCartney: I take your point, Mr. Martin. I was responding to an intervention from the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), who suggested that I had not played any part in the talks.

Mr. White *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: No, I want to continue—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] Let us hear the hon. Gentleman, then.

Mr. White: As I said on Monday, the history of Ulster is selective, and people remember history selectively. I seem to recall that the last person that the hon. and learned Gentleman described as a fascist was the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. No hon. Member would describe another hon. Member as a fascist. I am determined that we will get back to the amendment. It would be nice to hear about the amendment.

Mr. McCartney: The agreement would permit those who have been directly involved in violence—who are still associated with paramilitary organisations that have retained their weaponry, which have never accepted the principle of consent and which have not endorsed the agreement—to be in power, in the Executive, on the basis of an electoral mandate.

If we all feel that Sinn Fein elected Members are worthy participants in the democratic process, would it be wrong to suggest that they be disqualified if they are attached to or represent a proscribed organisation that is listed in schedule 2 to the emergency provisions Act? Does that seem unreasonable to any democrat? Should we not expect those people to declare that they are honouring a permanent and total cessation of violence? After all, that is what is required by paragraph 10 of the Downing street declaration. Are we going back on that declaration? Should they not surrender their illegal weaponry? That is another requirement of the Downing street declaration. Should they not make an unequivocal declaration of their acceptance of the six principles contained in the Mitchell report, to establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and to abide by the democratic process?

Could anyone in this House honestly say that a real democrat, who has eschewed violence and is not associated with or representing a paramilitary grouping with retained weaponry, would be averse to this amendment? That is what the debate is about. If hon. Members believe in democracy, if they believe that violence should not be rewarded, I urge them to support the amendment.

Mr. Mallon: I shall be brief, not because there is not much to be said about the amendment—there is—but because most of it has already been said. I do not doubt the sincerity of those who tabled it and those who have spoken in favour of it. It may come as a surprise to them that many of the rest of us feel the same way. Many of us are not happy with the situation.

When I look at some of the people in the talks process and realise what they have done, I find it difficult to maintain my equilibrium. However, politics is not about rectitude; solving problems is not about rectitude—it is about finding a way to tackle something that has lasted for almost 30 years, with almost 4,000 lives lost and many lives ruined.

The reality is that this House tried to tackle the situation in many ways. It tried internment without trial, which failed abysmally. It tried to tackle it with the heaviest saturation of Army and police personnel anywhere in the civilised world. That, too, failed. It tried using the prisons, but the hunger strikes are engraved in the memory of everyone in my community. That did not work, either.

It is not a matter of rectitude and how one feels, but of how we can silence the guns and turn rampant terrorism in another direction. The proposals may succeed, and the

[Mr. Mallon]

poachers may become gamekeepers—it has happened elsewhere in the world and in this jurisdiction throughout history, and it is nothing new that it should. Let us put it to the test.

The amendments are aimed not at my party or at the Government but at the leader of the Ulster Unionist party and the leadership of the main Opposition party. They should not be unnerved. Yes, everyone shares the feelings that have been expressed. Yes, people realise the difficulty that many on the Unionist Benches and our Benches would have—the feelings of revulsion and dislike. But what is more important—our own feelings, and a confirmation of our political views, or the well-being of the vast majority of the people living in the north of Ireland?

What we have to consider is not our personal likes or dislikes but how best we can deal with the violence and ensure that, if it is not eliminated, it is at least greatly reduced. It is not a terribly idealistic but a reasonable political assessment that those who have responsibility should try to save lives and create a new future.

We shall all have to bite our lips, and none more so than the members of our party. When we see some of the television interviews, listen to the pontification and recognise the sham, we shall have to bite our lips, because it is more important that we create a context in which violence might end for ever.

Mr. Grieve: It appeared that the hon. Gentleman was belittling rectitude—wrongly. Surely the rectitude that unites him and the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) is that which led them to eschew violence at a time when people were killing each other.

I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said, but does he accept that the difficulty for those who eschewed violence, despite the provocation of those who were perpetrating it, is that the inclusiveness of the proposals that will be put before the House, although not properly in the Bill, will require the inclusion of men who have so far not shown their full credentials in giving up violence? That is the fear which animates the amendments.

10.15 pm

Mr. Mallon: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I am not sure how to reply, as I come from that stock. I come from a tradition and a family who had to bury guns. I do not know where they buried them. In Ireland, that tradition goes back a very long time. This year we are celebrating the bicentenary of 1798. The real history of the past 25 years will resemble that of 1798. It will become distorted and almost patched up.

People from our tradition know in their hearts that the IRA will never surrender its illegal weapons. The amendment has more to do with politics across the Floor of the House than with solving the problems of decommissioning, but I do not question the motives or the rectitude of those who support it.

Let me refer to the last speech in the House on the issue by Sir Patrick Mayhew, now Lord Mayhew. I cannot quote the exact column or date, but it is ingrained in my memory. He said that decommissioning will take place on a voluntary basis or not at all. That is the reality.

I want every possible pressure to be put on those who hold arms to make sure that decommissioning takes place. I want both Governments to use all their skill to achieve that. I do not expect them to send letters to my party or any other party, because I know that they can work in different ways, but I expect both Governments to weigh up the safety and the greater good of people living in the north of Ireland and the prospect for the future in terms of the creation of lasting peace—although that is a long way off. That is what we expect, and I believe that it will be achieved by the agreement.

It would be absolutely wrong to have another Washington 3, as it took two years for the then Government to move away from it. When an absolute decision is taken, it becomes difficult. It would be dangerous tactically and politically for a Government, a main Opposition party or any other party to be pushed into a position in which preconditions are created post-agreement. If it happened, it is easy to guess who would gain.

If the agreement is adopted, Sinn Fein will get its mandate in the election. Its representatives will arrive at the gates of whatever building it will be—hon. Members know where I do not want it to be, although the Minister certainly does—with the cameras of the world upon them. *[Interruption.]* I note that other people recently had trouble getting in. If Sinn Fein representatives arrive with a mandate and with the cameras of the world upon them and are not allowed to take their seats, who will win?

If Sinn Fein gets in with sufficient numbers under the system agreed by all the parties, in the House and in the talks, but is not allowed to take its places in the Administration, who will win? What will happen every day on the floor of the assembly? What will happen to public perception? There is an old saying about people outside the tent, which I shall not repeat in this august company.

I want those who hijacked and debased the republicanism that I hold—who put it in the gutter through violence—to be tested on the only anvil that will test them: their participation in the normal democratic process. I want them tested not only on the television and in the media, but where it counts—at every level in government, in the assembly and in committees. When they are tested there, decommissioning will begin in a way that could never be achieved through the amendment.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He states, by implication, that he believes that the Prime Minister's letter of assurance to the leader of the Ulster Unionist party has no value, and that, once Sinn Fein is admitted, it will never be expelled for failing to commence and carry through a process of decommissioning.

Mr. Mallon: I did not receive a letter from the Prime Minister, and, to be honest, I am not greatly impressed by letters from Prime Ministers—not that I have much experience of them. Moreover, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) does not show me the letters that he receives from Prime Ministers.

Like Sir Patrick Mayhew, I believe that decommissioning will happen, and that it will happen voluntarily or not at all. It will happen not through exclusion, but through inclusion. It will come about as a result of the political process at every level working on those involved and on the entire community.

We must face the fact that the community we represent is unique—it has suffered very deeply. It will arrive at a point at which it will not tolerate the holding of arms, not through exclusivity or because people are made into martyrs, but through the proper working of the political process.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not seen the letter that was sent to my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). Would he mind if I read it to him, so that he could give his view? It said:

"Dear David"—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I would certainly object to the hon. Gentleman reading the letter.

Mr. Mallon: I shall consult the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) after the debate, and read the letter then. I shall not be surprised if I do not totally understand it, but I shall be surprised if the hon. Gentleman does. I shall be very surprised if the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), who might understand it, can explain it to those who do not, because I can imagine the way in which it is drafted. I do not say that in a pejorative sense.

I say about the agreement in its totality: let us tell it as it is, not put a spin on it and sell it as a great Unionist or nationalist victory, because it is no such thing. Let us not sell it as a means of getting decommissioning before the assembly is set up, because that will not happen.

There is something wider, deeper and more fundamental at stake: something that takes us right down into the next century. Anyone with a feel for Irish history—Unionist or nationalist—knows that the terms of the amendment would never solve the problem. I ask hon. Members to repeat to the Government and to the Opposition: do not be conned or forced into another Washington 3, because that could undo all the work that has been done, without getting anywhere near solving the problem of decommissioning.

Mr. Beggs: Is the hon. Gentleman confirming by his observations that all the references to decommissioning and the Mitchell principles, which gave hope to all the wishful thinkers who are being induced to support the agreement, were a con to bring us to this stage, and that there was never really any intention to insist on decommissioning?

Mr. Mallon: I cannot speak for Senator Mitchell or for the people in the international commission. I give my own view, which is that decommissioning will not be achieved through an approach such as that embodied in the amendment. I believe that it will happen when there are certain convergences of different factors.

I am talking not about a united Ireland, but about a time long before that happens. I hope that I am right in prejudging that it will happen. The convergence of certain factors and sets of circumstances can lead to decommissioning, but any other approach will prevent it. Not only will the argument be lost; the gains that could come out of the agreement will be lost with it.

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) uncharacteristically and, I trust, inadvertently, slightly misled the House. I want to put the record straight and to reconfirm what the Prime Minister said at Question Time and what I said on Second Reading.

We have asked the Minister to consider the fact that when the major constitutional Bill to set up the assembly—as opposed to the current Bill, which provides for the shadow assembly and the elections—comes before the House, we will want a clause that says that no Members of the Assembly can be appointed Ministers if the paramilitaries that they are associated with have not substantially decommissioned or have resorted to violence in any shape or form.

That is very different from what is in the amendment. I want to put the record absolutely straight so there is no possible misunderstanding.

Mr. Thompson: I support the amendment. As far as I can detect from what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said, he agrees with the amendment in principle—indeed, he might agree with it in substance—but, because he feels that it would not be carried out in practice, he will not support it. If one believes something in principle, one should carry it out. If the SDLP uses that type of reasoning and argument, it will find that another party will swallow it up because it will tell the electorate that it is the party that gets results. Members of the SDLP should be careful in going down that road.

10.30 pm

I, too, am sceptical about whether the Government will accept the amendment. They may talk piously of giving up arms, decommissioning and all the rest, but, as far as I can discover, they cannot accept the amendment because it would mean that Sinn Fein would not get into the assembly and that is the deal that has been made to get Sinn Fein in. All the high-falutin' principle and the rest about decommissioning and using peaceful means is merely rhetoric and means nothing.

Surely we have learnt that of the six Mitchell principles, which were followed more in the breach than in their observance. Even while those who had accepted the principles were in the talks, the organisations that they were associated with were carrying out beatings and murders. Only when they were caught were the representatives excluded. The idea that the Mitchell principles—even though they had been signed up to—were in any way effective is nonsense.

The hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), who spoke for the Opposition, does not, as far as I can see, yet understand the nature of the new assembly. While the Bill deals with the assembly in its first stage, the conditions and rules will also apply when it becomes active. The idea that we will have a new constitutional Bill that will change everything that we have here is not real. It will not then be possible to table and make amendments on decommissioning, so this amendment is right and proper.

Surely those who enter the democratic system must eschew violence. They must forget about it, give it up and agree to abide only by democratic means. If they are not prepared to agree to that obligation, they should not be allowed to enter the assembly. I support the amendment.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): The amendment is entirely consistent with the position that the Conservative

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

Government adopted. The Downing street declaration, which launched the process, was an urge for inclusive dialogue, but it was conditional on two points: first, the acceptance of the principle of consent and, secondly, an unequivocal commitment to exclusively peaceful means—the renunciation of violence. Over the past five years, that position was somewhat re-presented through the Mitchell paper and the Mitchell principles but the Conservative Government remained committed to decommissioning in parallel with the dialogue. That has not materialised. The position that we defended in government is consistent with the amendment. The Bill could allow participation in the assembly at executive level of people who have not unequivocally rejected violence.

Mr. Paul Murphy: This has been an interesting debate. No hon. Member supports violence or disagrees that the Mitchell principles, which lay at the base of the talks that have taken place during the past two years, are the proper foundation for a democratic society in Northern Ireland or anywhere else, but there has been little reference, except by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), to why we are here this evening. We are here because of the agreement.

The Bill is based on an agreement. The agreement was made on Good Friday, but it had been in preparation for many months—indeed, years. Of course it is important that decommissioning is an indispensable part of the process. It would be a travesty if there were a return to violence and those responsible for it were Ministers in an administration. Everyone accepts that, but how do we ensure that those matters are addressed by the assembly? Today, we are dealing with the assembly, how it will discipline itself, and how its Ministers, if they went back to violence, would be dealt with.

Page 10 of the agreement deals with the pledge of office. For example, Ministers would have to pledge their

"commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means".

Page 7 states:

"An individual may be removed from office following a decision of the Assembly taken on a cross-community basis, if (s)he loses the confidence of the Assembly".

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the Minister agree that there is nothing in the agreement that refers to parties? It refers only to individual Ministers. The undertakings and pledges are personal. As the hon. Member for Derry said—*[Laughter.]* As Gilbert and Sullivan said, it is innocent merriment. As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said, nothing in the agreement requires anything other than an individual to give the pledge or be removed. Unless a Minister has been apprehended, or involved in some act of violence, or has personally commissioned or authorised some act of violence, he cannot be removed. The Minister agreed that the talks would be parallel with decommissioning and that when agreement was achieved there would be some practical demonstration of the commencement of decommissioning. That has not occurred.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, and my experience of politicians in Northern Ireland tells me that when the assembly is set up and when the code of conduct is debated during the months of preparation for when the assembly takes over the functions of the Northern Ireland Departments, there will be much debate in that chamber about the nature of the pledge of office, the code of conduct that Ministers must sign, and the points that the hon. and learned Gentleman has just made. For that matter, during the past few months—once here in London and once in Dublin—individuals and parties were expelled from the talks on the basis of what occurred.

I repeat that the agreement that was reached by the Governments and the parties in the talks refers to the issues that have been raised in the debate today. Of course it does; they are important matters. If the assembly is to mean anything, it must have control over how it conducts itself when it takes over the full functions that it is entitled to take over under the agreement and under the major constitutional Bill that we shall consider later this spring and in the summer.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister went into some detail this afternoon in response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition. For example, he has said that if during the first six months of the shadow assembly or the assembly the provisions have been shown to be ineffective, the Government will support changes to those provisions to enable them to be made properly effective. I am happy to repeat that commitment tonight.

It seems to me that that is more than straightforward and satisfactory. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that we will support such changes, but, at the end of the day, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh said, the establishment of trust and confidence among parties in the assembly after the election is the only way in which peace will come to Northern Ireland and political stability can be achieved. There is no other way, and we have to ensure that it is within the assembly that the changes occur. However, we will watch it with great interest as the weeks go by.

Mr. William Ross: The Minister has just repeated yet again the very careful language in the letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), which says that the Government will support changes to the provisions. Supporting changes is not making changes to the provisions. The support will not be effective because all the other parties involved in the agreement will have to go along with the change, and they will not.

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) was talking about reshuffles earlier. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to disagree with the Prime Minister this evening. The issue is pretty clear. With your permission, Mr. Martin, I shall read the hon. Gentleman a passage from the agreement. The assembly that we are setting up tonight in shadow form and the later assembly that will be established in the major Bill later

"will meet first for the purpose of organisation, without legislative or executive powers, to resolve its standing orders . . . In this transitional period, those members of the Assembly serving as shadow Ministers shall affirm their commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means and the opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose; to work in good faith to bring the new arrangements into being; and to observe the spirit of the Pledge of Office applying to appointed Ministers."

That applies to shadow Ministers and Ministers when they take office. It cannot be clearer than that.

Mr. Thompson: Why will the Government not say that they will make rather than support changes? Does that not confirm our view that in this agreement the British Government have conceded to a large extent their absolute sovereignty over that part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Murphy: In the agreement that has been forged and the debate this evening, it is not a question of the British, Irish or any other Government imposing anything on the people of Northern Ireland. The purpose of the agreement is in the nature of the word—it is an agreement made between Governments and parties. That is why we are discussing these matters. Obviously, we have a concern, because we are the Government in Northern Ireland, but the whole purpose of tonight is to ensure that the government of Northern Ireland is in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland. I have confidence that they will be able to manage the process.

Mr. Peter Robinson: This has been a useful debate. It has been illuminating in many ways. The Minister has shot himself in the foot—indeed, with his most recent remarks, he has shot himself in the kneecap.

The Minister made two vital errors. The first was to say that the expulsion of the UDP and Sinn Fein from the talks process compares with what would happen under the agreement. The forum legislation—the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996—makes it abundantly clear that it is the parties that have to keep the Mitchell principles and that if they do not do that, the members of the party are to be put out. That provision tied the behaviour of the organisation itself and those with whom it associated, but on this occasion the parties and their organisations are not included; only the individual is tied. That is the smoking-gun scenario: a Minister must be caught with a smoking gun in his hand to be put out of the Government or out of the assembly. The condition applies not to the party but only to the individual. There is no requirement to decommission; nor is there a requirement for the party to be in ceasefire mode. That is the reality and it was the Minister's first error.

10.45 pm

The second error was to say that this is an agreement and therefore that it is not up to the Minister to give the assurances that have been asked for. That is precisely our point: there are little pieces of paper floating around with the Prime Minister's signature on them, but although the Prime Minister is a mighty man in the House of Commons, he is only one party to a multi-party agreement and is therefore not capable of changing the agreement unilaterally—he simply cannot do it. Even if there were some meaning to the piece of paper—there is not—it can be read in at least three ways. Even if there were some meaning to it, it simply would not affect the agreement.

As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said, he never got a copy of the letter, so he is not bound by it; nor are any of the other parties, because they have not even seen it. They did not need to see it, because it does not affect the agreement that was reached. On 22 May, people will not be asked to say yes to the agreement plus a couple of letters from the Prime Minister and an assurance from the Minister who is on the Front Bench tonight. They are being asked to say yes or no to this agreement alone. Those are the two vital issues with which Minister has helped us this evening.

I cannot understand the position of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). He says that the Conservative position differs greatly from that expressed in the amendments. I do not know whether he has read amendment No. 29, which seems to me to be identical to the Conservatives' position. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), who obviously has read amendment No. 29, recognises that it is precisely what the hon. Member for Bracknell was asking for earlier: conditions have to apply before anybody from the assembly will be entitled to be in government.

I would not for one minute question the desire of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh for full decommissioning—he has said nothing that is inconsistent with that desire—but I hope that he notices the counsel of despair that has brought him to the position he takes. He says that the Government have tried security measures, that they have tried punishment, that they have tried this and that they have tried that and that, because none has worked, we have to try another way, which is to reward terrorists. Because we have been unable to deal with terrorism using security measures or by imprisoning terrorists, we must allow them entry into government and open the prisons—all those rewards must be given to buy them over.

If there were any sense in that proposal, it could only be on the basis that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said—that there had been a sea change in attitude on the terrorists' part; that they had been prepared to renounce violence permanently; that they had been prepared to commit themselves exclusively to peaceful and democratic means; and that they had been prepared to make a new start. In those circumstances, the hon. Gentleman might have at least an academic argument, but the terrorists have done none of those things.

Let us consider what has happened on decommissioning. The Conservative Government said that for the IRA to be involved in talks it must decommission. As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said, that requirement was watered down at Washington 3. It was then said that the IRA had to make a start on decommissioning to show that it was on board—that it was serious about the proposal.

That requirement was wiped away. An international commission was set up. It said, "Some people want decommissioning at the start, but it will not happen. Others want it at the end. The only reasonable balance is to have some decommissioning during the talks process." On that basis, the Ulster Unionist party was prepared to sit down at the negotiating table.

It did not happen. Not one gun, not one ounce of Semtex, not one bullet, and not one detonator was decommissioned throughout the process, although it had been set up on the strict understanding that parallel decommissioning would take place—the international commission had set that condition—and now the IRA will get into government without decommissioning. We are told that voluntary decommissioning may take place, but there is no requirement for it to take place. Members of the IRA walk through a talks process without handing

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

over any guns; they walk into Government without handing over any guns; and there is no requirement for decommissioning to occur.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman and I agree with him. A major part of the Mitchell principles, which were launched with a fanfare of trumpets, was decommissioning. Why, in the hon. Gentleman's opinion, has decommissioning been placed on the back burner when constructive talks leading to meaningful progress can be implemented and carried forward successfully only if terrorists of all political persuasions do not continue to be in possession of huge quantities of explosive, bullets and weapons? My question is, why have Her Majesty's Opposition and the Government not insisted on decommissioning?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is far too long.

Mr. Robinson: I believe that the answer is simple. Decommissioning has been put on the back burner because the Government and the Opposition know that the terrorists will not give up their guns. Why do terrorists not give up their guns? Because they want to leave open the option that, if things do not go precisely as they have choreographed them, they will use those guns again.

There is a second reason why guns remain in terrorists' possession. The threat that brought the Government to their knees and caused them to sign this sordid agreement still hangs above their head. Those are the reasons that the terrorists hold on to their guns. That is why the Government were faced with that adamant refusal to hand them over and caved in to the terrorists.

It is a sad reality that the Government have been prepared to allow Sinn Fein through the process without making one concession.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he answer this single question? What does he believe is more important: that the paramilitary groups decommission their weapons or that peace as we know it now continues? What is more important to him?

Mr. Robinson: I do not believe that there will ever be peace while the terrorists hold on to their weapons. That is not an option. The terrorists are holding on to their weapons and are using them even now. When they do not want to be seen to be using them, they give them to someone else who pulls the trigger for them. That is the reality of the situation.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh should not ask people to choose between two evils. *[Interruption.]* I think that holding on to guns is pretty evil—perhaps some of you do not think so. When you are prepared to put terrorists in the Government of Northern Ireland and when you are prepared to open prisons and you think that it is peace—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) knows the rules of the House: he should not use the word you.

Mr. Robinson: I apologise, Mr. Martin. I do not wish to associate you with any of the suggestions that I am making to Labour Members. They describe what they have bought into as a peace process, but they will not get peace—it does not come by way of a peace process. No peace will result from this agreement. The IRA is pocketing the concessions and, as Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness made clear at the weekend, this phase is over and a new phase begins. The IRA's goal is the same: it does not intend to change its methods. It will return to doing what Francie Molloy described as what it does best—and we all know exactly what that happens to be.

I see no peace in this peace process. I see plenty of process, and I know where that leads: to a united Ireland.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 10, Noes 174.

Division No. 253] **[10.56 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford
Hunter, Andrew
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. William Thompson and Mr. Peter Robinson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burnett, John
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'hs)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Janet Anderson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. William Ross: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 2, leave out lines 35 and 36.

The amendment would simply remove the two lines of clause 4(3)(b) which state:

"that he is a member of the Seanad Eireann (Senate of the Republic of Ireland)."

Any person who sits in a legislature owes it a duty of service and loyalty, and I do not know how one can sit in the legislatures of two different nations, both of which claim the same piece of territory, and say that one owes loyalty to both. Therefore, the amendment is perfectly sensible and reasonable.

Perhaps the Government's policy is to cede authority over parts of the United Kingdom. If so, the Bill as printed is perfectly in keeping with that view. It is not my view, and I hope that the Government will show that they are serving Her Majesty properly by protecting the realm and all parts of it. I do not think that any anyone in this Parliament or in the New Northern Ireland Assembly, presumably with loyalty to the existence of Northern Ireland, can sit in another legislature that claims to remove part of the United Kingdom from the United Kingdom. We cannot serve two masters: we must serve one or the other. I have great pleasure in recommending the amendment.

Mr. Mallon: As I said earlier, I have more than a passing interest in the change of legislation. In 1982, I was a member of Seanad Eireann and, for my sins, I was disqualified from the then Northern Ireland Assembly and had to pay substantial costs. It was the only time to date that I found myself in the dock. I admit that I took some pleasure from it, because one of the matters—

It being seven hours after the commencement of proceedings, THE CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to the Order [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

THE CHAIRMAN *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 5 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [this day], That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 10.

Division No. 254] **[11.14 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burnett, John
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David

Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Tricketi, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Vaz, Keith
Waller, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Janet Anderson and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Forsythe, Clifford
Hunter, Andrew
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roy Beggs and
Mr. William Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Northern Ireland

11.24 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland Negotiations (Referendum) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 20th April, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 20th April, be approved.

Mr. Murphy: The first order provides for a referendum to be held in Northern Ireland on the outcome of the multi-party talks.

Peace in Northern Ireland has to be founded on a settlement, and this settlement is squarely based on the principle of consent. At the beginning of the talks, we made our commitment to the so-called triple lock. Consent was needed from the parties through the agreement; from the House of Commons and the House of Lords; and, of course, from the people of Northern Ireland through a vote in the referendum. It is through this triple lock that we can be sure that the agreement represents the future that everyone wants—that it is a way forward for the government of Northern Ireland that commands cross-community support.

Every home in Northern Ireland has been sent a copy of the agreement. Everyone will have the opportunity to scrutinise it. The order allows us to put a vital question to the people. Without it, the people of Northern Ireland could not make their voices heard on what was achieved by their representatives at Castle buildings. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on Monday, the decisive judgment must come from the people whose daily lives will be directly affected by it.

The basis for the order was provided by section 4 of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996. The legislation determining how and when the referendum will be held—this order—is straightforward and clear. Indeed, most of it is standard material.

Article 3 of the order provides that a referendum shall be held on Friday 22 May between the hours of 7 am and 10 pm. Article 4 sets out who is entitled to vote in the election—those who have been entered on the electoral register of parliamentary electors in Northern Ireland, excluding overseas voters but including peers.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already expressed her gratitude to all those who made the agreement possible. In reaching a decision on this key issue, we believe that the most straightforward and fair method of determining the will of the people is for the people in Northern Ireland to exercise their franchise and vote in the referendum.

The second order refers to the cessation of the forum. As the House will know, the forum was set up as part of the talks process. Indeed, the life of the forum coincided with the life of the talks. If the Belfast agreement wins support in the referendum planned for 22 May, we shall have elections to a new representative body in Northern Ireland, which will, once the transitional phase is over,

at long last permit those who have been elected by the people of Northern Ireland to take those decisions that are currently taken by me, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and by ministerial colleagues. I hope that, for some of those who participate in the New Northern Ireland Assembly, experience in the forum will prove to have been valuable preparation.

We might take a moment to look back on the record of the forum since it was set up in June 1996. It was established with the central objective of discussing issues relevant to the promotion of dialogue and understanding between the communities in Northern Ireland. It was unable to discharge that role fully because not all parties took part in it. However, many of the people who took part did try hard to take account of as wide a spectrum of opinion as possible on the various issues. I want to place on record my thanks to the forum's chairman, Mr. John Gorman, for the commitment he displayed in guiding discussion through some very testing debate and for his efforts to act fairly and honourably in the discharge of his duties.

I should also like to pay tribute to the chairmen of the various standing committees for serving the forum in those capacities and to the members of the Business Committee for the role they played in managing the forum's business and events.

I believe that, controversial as the forum at times has been, there have been positive aspects to its collective work and that of individual members, and that that positive work is capable of standing Northern Ireland in good stead as we move forward to the implementation of the Belfast agreement. I commend the orders to the House.

11.29 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): We have always maintained that any settlement in Northern Ireland is entirely dependent on the triple lock. The first part of the triple lock was achieved on Good Friday, when a majority of the parties in both communities signed the Belfast agreement. Now it is essential that we have the second part of the triple lock, which means the people of Northern Ireland expressing their view by way of a referendum. If the outcome is positive, the third part of the triple lock—a vote in both Houses of this Parliament—will be necessary. Therefore, we have absolutely no hesitation in supporting the orders.

11.30 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): The House should pause for a moment before taking a decision that I think it will regret.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Why?

Mr. Robinson: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. He can be sure that before I sit down, he will know why.

The Government are asking the people of Northern Ireland, who have faced a quarter of a century and more of terrorism, to watch while those who have oppressed them, those who have perpetrated violence against them, and those who have stopped them having a normal life are elevated and rewarded.

The agreement, which is to be put to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum, is an agreement that puts into the very Government of Northern Ireland representatives of the Provisional IRA's army council—Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. Under the agreement, once they are in that Government, they will hold full ministerial portfolios which will be exercised in a more wide-ranging way than is the case in the rest of the United Kingdom.

All that the Cabinet—if it can be called that—does is to work out its annual policy programme, and, within that broad policy programme, Ministers can do almost what they want. So, we shall have two Sinn Fein-IRA Ministers, in an elevated position and gentrified by the agreement, running around Northern Ireland, exercising control over the very people whom they have oppressed for a generation.

Mr. Frank Cook: Many of us can understand why the hon. Gentleman is opposed to the orders, but I personally cannot understand why he is against the people of Northern Ireland expressing an opinion.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman should have waited before intervening. I have not said that I am against the people of Northern Ireland expressing an opinion. Indeed, if he knew a bit more about the subject, he would be aware that it was my party which asked for a referendum. We want the people of Northern Ireland to have their say, but I am entitled to explain to the House what the House is asking the people of Northern Ireland to vote on. The only choice that the House is giving the people of Northern Ireland is to vote for or against the agreement—there are to be no alternatives on the ballot paper.

The first thing that the agreement will do is put into the Government IRA army council members and give them full executive authority to operate key Departments in Northern Ireland. Secondly, it gives a veto to nationalists within the assembly. I can remember campaigning with colleagues in the UUP and the then Vanguard Unionist party against the Sunningdale agreement back in the early 1970s. We were Unionists, and we saw the Sunningdale agreement as a process that led to a united Ireland.

What did the Sunningdale agreement do? It put Gerry Fitt, now Lord Fitt, in government in Northern Ireland. The people who stood shoulder to shoulder with us—people such as the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, Reginald Empey of the Ulster Unionist party and the deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist party—who opposed having Gerry Fitt in government are now saying, "Let's have Gerry Adams instead." I am not sure that the people of Northern Ireland will feel that their judgment has improved over the years.

At least the Sunningdale agreement allowed decisions to be taken by simple majority voting. Under the proposed system, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) pointed out, decisions will be taken by consensus. They require not a simple vote within the assembly, but a majority of one section of the community and at least 40 per cent. of the other. So there is a minority veto within the assembly.

The agreement sets up an all-Ireland body with full executive power and implementing bodies attached to it. They can take decisions and implement them—a process recognised by Sinn Fein-IRA as an advancement towards

[Mr. Robinson]

its goal of a united Ireland. Will Unionists recommend that to the people of Northern Ireland? If that were not bad enough—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Conversations are breaking out generally throughout the Chamber. I would be grateful if hon. Members would listen to the hon. Gentleman who is addressing the House.

Mr. Robinson: That is the very last thing that hon. Members want to do. To listen might lead to their being convinced and that might cause them considerable problems with their Whips, so they close their ears rather than hear the truth.

Apart from the structural issues contained within the agreement and the referendum, there is a prospect that, within two years, the worst criminals from both sections of the community will be released onto the streets. No one will remain in gaol if he belongs to a pro-agreement paramilitary organisation. The judge's recommendation might have been that such a criminal should be locked up for 35 years or should never see daylight again, but in two years' time he will be walking down the street again. Walking down the same street, perhaps in the other direction, might be a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary—the very man who put him in gaol—and he would laugh at him.

Although the agreement does not require paramilitary organisations to decommission, there are clear indications that the RUC will be required to disarm. Indeed, an international body of so-called experts is to be established to examine the future of the RUC, with the specific remit to consider a new policing structure and a new police service for Northern Ireland that has to be satisfactory to both sections of the community.

We know the view of the SDLP in respect of a new police service. They want a root and branch change. Sinn Fein goes a step further. It wants a completely new police service and has indicated that it would like a two-tier police service with a community input. That is a clear sign that the RUC will effectively be destroyed.

All the issues show that the winners in the process are the pan-nationalist front. As the SDLP said earlier this evening, it has been pushing for this agenda for 25 years and now it has it. The SDLP has admitted that it is a nationalist agenda—one which it has sought for 25 years. Is not it disgraceful that it should achieve its goal because Unionists signed up to it? I cannot understand how those who opposed Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement can support something that is worse—not for nationalists, but for Unionists.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): What is the hon. Gentleman's alternative?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman asks me what my alternative is—he has clearly not read Democratic Unionist party documents, which have offered alternative after alternative. If he wants to offer me an alternative, I will take what Scotland has—I should be happy for Northern Ireland to have the same structures that the House was content to give to Scotland. Scotland was not asked to give away its sovereignty and join some foreign country, so why should that be required of us?

Many alternatives would be satisfactory to the Unionist community. Democracy would be a nice alternative—democratic rule instead of Dublin rule. Indeed, I would rather have direct rule than Dublin rule. The Unionist community has plenty of alternatives, but we shall never accept a process that leads inevitably to a united Ireland.

I hope that, on 22 May, the people of Northern Ireland will not be sold the lie that the agreement will produce peace. It will not produce peace. It rewards terrorism. It says to the men of violence, "Your bombing and shooting have succeeded in getting you a place, not only at the negotiating table, but in government. Your shooting and bombing have succeeded in opening the prisons." The agreement is a charter for more terrorism. Terrorists learn that, if their terrorism brings success, more terrorism will lead to greater success. The agreement will not wipe away violence. The one certainty is that the Provisional IRA will pocket every concession that it is given and start to push for more.

The IRA sees the agreement as a transitional phase towards its goal, which it will not give up. Northern Ireland has been put in transit from its position in the United Kingdom; it has been moved into a different axis, which points it to the Republic of Ireland. Its day-to-day political life has to be in tandem with the Irish Republic, and we are less and less to look to the east-west axis.

Many hon. Members may think that that is good—from a nationalist point of view, they are entitled to believe that it is good. However, I will not allow the Unionist community in Northern Ireland to believe that the Union is more secure today than it was when the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) sat down at the table.

How can the Union be more secure with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in government, with a nationalist veto in an assembly and with an all-Ireland body with full executive powers? How can the Union be more secure when terrorists are not required to decommission weapons, when our police force is to be destroyed and when the gates of the prisons are to be swung open so that terrorists can walk free?

I shall be asking people to vote no when they have the opportunity on 22 May, and I hope that the Government recognise that they need more than 50 per cent. plus one to support the agreement. By its nature, the agreement requires consensus. To give a veto to nationalists, the Government have, inadvertently but necessarily, given a veto to Unionists, as nothing can go through the assembly without the support of a majority of the Unionist community as well. Because a majority of nationalists and Unionists is required, the Government need more than 70 per cent. of the electorate to vote in favour of the agreement.

I have fought many elections—something like 26—and have a fair idea of the way the political wind blows in Northern Ireland.

If anyone believes the opinion polls that are tampered with and doctored by the Northern Ireland Office, they will have a big surprise. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members laugh: perhaps they have not seen the document that was leaked from the Northern Ireland Office—it was written by Tom Kelly, previously of the BBC and now the director of communications in the Northern Ireland Office—expressly stating how the people of Northern Ireland were to be deceived about opinion polls.

The fact came out that the Government intended to line up all the movers and shakers, including Archbishop Eames, and to time all the press statements to come out one after the other to get the people of Northern Ireland to believe that there was a real bandwagon going for the agreement. It was all laid out in the leaked document, which mentioned how the opinion polls were to be made to bolster the Government's position.

I speak to people and get their opinions. Outside the leadership of the Ulster Unionist party, I am still looking for the first Unionist who supports the agreement. I have been in the streets and in my advice centres, which I attend much more often than do any Labour Members. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Oh, yes. I wonder how many days a week you sit in your advice centres and how many appointments you take every—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the correct parliamentary language, and I would be grateful if he would direct his remarks towards the draft orders.

Mr. Robinson: I am content to address the referendum issue, and the opinions of the people must be central to what the referendum is about. I am making it very clear that, although the Northern Ireland Office and its Ministers may attempt, as the leaked document said, to give the impression that the agreement has overwhelming support in Northern Ireland, a majority of the Unionist people will not vote yes to the agreement. If hon. Members do not believe it now, they may be prepared to change their minds after 22 May.

What are the circumstances for assistance to the two campaigns in the referendum? The Republic of Ireland Government funds the two campaigns equally. They do not count the number of parties in either section and give an allocation on that basis. The two camps get similar funding. That, I understand, is not the Government's intention. They intend to help the yes campaign on a 4:1 basis. Will the Minister make it clear that he will fund the two campaigns equally?

I join the Minister in expressing appreciation, both personally and on behalf of my party, to the chairman of the forum, John Gorman. He is in every sense of the word a gentleman. Anyone who chairs a political forum with elected representatives from Northern Ireland has a difficult task. Politicians from Northern Ireland can be very passionate about their politics. He has had a major task to perform, but he has done it without causing offence to any member of the forum, and he walks out of it with the respect of all the members. I am not sure that many others could have attained that.

John Gorman has done an excellent job, and so has the forum. It is often derided, especially by those who would not play a full part in it, but every week committees considered every aspect of government and produced reports that went to Ministers. Even this Friday, another Minister will come to the forum to speak to members and answer their questions. It has been a worthwhile exercise. I happen to believe in devolution. I would love to have seen a real devolved Government in Northern Ireland.

Regrettably, this agreement more than anything else has shattered that dream because it makes it clear that there is a price for devolution and it is that we have to link ourselves up to an all-Ireland process at the same time. As far as I am concerned, that is a price which is too high to pay. Therefore, the only alternative for the people of Northern Ireland is to have a completely United Kingdom settlement. It is not possible for the people of Northern Ireland to have devolution without its being tied into a united Ireland process.

Therefore, the forum has been a useful exercise. Regrettably, it will never have any powers and I do not believe that any real democratic assembly will ever replace it.

11.50 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): We have come to the end of this debate, and it is time to go forward to the country to fight in the referendum and subsequently in the election for the assembly.

At the referendum, the people of Northern Ireland will be faced with two choices, whether to vote yes for the agreement or no. All the media will be for a yes, as will many of the great and good and also several Church leaders, because many believe that they should always follow the establishment, but there will be others, and I shall be one of them, who will unashamedly ask the people to vote no. If they vote yes, they will be voting to be second-class citizens within the United Kingdom. If they vote yes and accept the agreement, they will be accepting that this Parliament no longer wants them and that, in reality, it wishes to put them into a united Ireland.

If people vote yes in the referendum, they will be voting that those who have murdered their kinsmen and done the most foul deeds be released on to the streets. If they vote yes, they will be voting that the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which is the finest police force in the world, should be changed out of all recognition and be that great body no more. That is what will happen if they vote yes.

There are those who will say, "If you vote no, you're against peace," and, "If you vote no, the agreement will be imposed on you anyway." I say to them: if the British Government want to impose something on Northern Ireland against the wishes of the Northern Ireland people, let them do so, but we do not have to agree with it or be part of it.

Again, there are those who will say, "If you vote no, what is the alternative?" For the Ulster people, the alternative is to demand, as equal citizens of the United Kingdom, that they be treated the same—equally—and have parity with every other part of the United Kingdom.

The people of Northern Ireland, especially the Unionist people, demand no advantage. They do not demand anything greater than anyone else. All we demand is that we are treated as equal citizens within this kingdom and that the same rules and system of government apply in Northern Ireland as in every other part of the United Kingdom.

For far too long, we have been bedevilled by the idea that there are two, diverse, opposite communities in Northern Ireland—that every Roman Catholic is a nationalist and every Protestant a Unionist. The reality is different: more than 70 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland are quite happy to live in the United Kingdom, abide by its laws and accept the police force of Northern Ireland. Only a small minority bent on violence is determined to split the people of Northern Ireland and eventually to take us out of the United Kingdom. It is

[Mr. William Thompson]

only by voting no that the people of Northern Ireland can insist that they will not be second-class citizens, that they will not go into a united Ireland and that they wish to be equal to every other citizen of the United Kingdom.

Some Scottish Members have spoken tonight. You are getting a Parliament in Scotland. You would not accept in Scotland what you say we have to accept in Northern Ireland. You would not accept a power-sharing Executive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman, as I have just reminded another hon. Member, first to use the correct parliamentary language, and, secondly, to address the draft orders?

Mr. Thompson: I have almost finished. Hon. Members from Scotland and Wales are trying to force on Northern Ireland something that they would not have for themselves. That is rank hypocrisy.

11.56 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): What a sad litany we heard from the hon. Members for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson). They claim to be democrats, but seem to be frightened of the democratic process. That is the basic issue. They say that they regret asking the people whether they want lasting peace, a say in their future or to live in normality like the rest of the people of the United Kingdom. Regrets? We have no regrets. The people of Northern Ireland should have the chance, and on 22 May we hope that they will have it, to put aside those siren voices and vote yes overwhelmingly. We support the orders.

11.57 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): It is amusing to hear the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). His sister party cannot even get people elected to this House, yet he tells us what the people of Northern Ireland think. How many times has Lord Alderdice fought Belfast, East and how many thumpings has my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) given him? The deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats' sister party could not even elected to the forum; he had to be a top-up candidate.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East spoke, people laughed about the document that I have here. That is why I have intervened. The document was approved by the Secretary of State and was drawn up by a fellow called Kelly, who has his own interests. He is a civil servant, but he has large interests in advertising and public relations firms. He says that advertising on its own will not convince the public to vote yes in the referendum, but, as part of an integrated campaign, it could play a crucial role in alerting the public to precisely what is at stake.

I notice from the document that has been given to us that the Government are going to spend £3 million on this election. What is that for? The document says that the cost of the election is not expected to exceed £3 million. Three million pounds is to be spent in the south of Ireland, but there is a difficulty because there the money must be halved: £1.5 million has to be set aside for the no campaign and £1.5 million for the yes campaign. That is not so in Northern Ireland.

I am leader of the second largest party in the forum. Hon. Members have spoken of the Democratic Unionist party as a rump party, like the Progressive Unionist or Ulster Democratic parties. The official Unionists have 30 members, my party has 24 members, the SDLP 21 and I think that Sinn Fein has 17. So here we have parties entering into the process. Can the Minister tell us tonight what he is going to do about the matters that I mentioned? Where is the £3 million to be spent? Of course, Mr. Kelly says that he has got a man closely associated with him personally. The document says that he has commissioned McCann Erickson to have both quantitative and qualitative research carried out without its being seen to be Government-inspired. This is the transparency of new Labour. Oh yes, whether we are doing any advertising or not.

We have a great advertisement in our papers saying, "The Choice is Yours". There is no signature on it. When we took the advertising and turned it round, an action was brought against us for copyright and we found out who was behind it. It was Kelly—he was doing it. Three million pounds.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said, "We want to have a referendum." It was my party which fought for a referendum. My party disagreed with the official Unionist party on that very issue. I believe that we should have a referendum, but I want to say to the Government that they should be prepared to play on a level playing field and say, "All right, let the people of Ulster speak. We shall divide the money." I do not mind if no money comes from the Government.

The other day there was an £8,000 advertisement in the paper. Who was it from? There is not a politician in this House who knows. I have my ear fairly well to the ground and I do not know. I have questioned many and they do not know. It was from the silent majority. What was its heading? It was, "The agreement is suicidal to Ulster". It shocked Northern Ireland. Mr. Kelly had the rickets when he saw it. The Government have now called in a Mr. Tony McCusker to co-ordinate a database that will pick out key movers and shakers from all sections of the community. The spin doctors are at work all right. They are doing a good job.

Unfortunately, the name was let out—none other than the Archbishop of Armagh. The poor archbishop nearly had the rickets too because his telephone started to ring. People from the Church of Ireland called to say, "We do not like archbishops who are in politics. Politics is a dirty game and you should not be in it." Others said, "And you are going to try and sell us out in Northern Ireland." The poor archbishop was very angry and the Secretary of State had to apologise, and one apology was not enough. He had to give a further apology. One by one, the names of the shakers are coming out and people are now saying, "We do not want to be identified with this."

The Government should not think that the Northern Ireland people are stupid and that they are going to listen to people just because the Government employ them.

Northern Ireland is a very small place; we know everything about everybody and everybody knows everything about us. So let me say to the House tonight that this is not the way to conduct politics. Let the people of Northern Ireland have their say, but let it be on a level playing field. I know what is happening. I know some of the dirty tricks played in the past by Departments and Governments on this side of the water. I know all about it and let me tell the House: truth will out.

I am looking forward to 22 May, but I have not heard the Government make any comment on what I said in the other debate, or on what my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East said about the consensus. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said, "We shall certainly need well over the 70 per cent. mark," but he has now reduced that figure to over the 60 per cent. mark, and soon it will be down to just over the 50 per cent. mark. Let me tell the House that to have a clear statement that the majority of both nationalists and Unionists agree, the yes vote must be 70 per cent. We shall see.

Let the election take place, but let it take place in fairness and not with the taking of taxpayers' money and trying to make people believe as the Government believe, outlined in this document. They do not have to live there; they do not have to follow the coffins; they do not have to suffer. This past week, I have had with me a lady who lost her husband in a brutal attack by an IRA man. She said to me, "I am afraid that I'll not even have the courage to go out of my home when the man is released who killed my husband." What do we say to people like her—that we are sensitive to her troubles, but we have to let such men out?

The House should allow the election to take place in an honourable and decent manner, not with the sort of thing outlined in this document and the misuse of £3 million. I want to know what the £3 million is for.

12.6 am

Mr. Paul Murphy: It is easy to attack civil servants, who cannot answer back. It is important to realise that had the party of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) taken part in the agreement, he might well have been able to influence the matters that he does not appear to like. It is also important to understand that nearly 1 million people are entitled to vote in Northern Ireland, so the expenditure to which the hon. Gentleman refers is hardly elaborate. When it is borne in mind that the parties that were members of the talks process represent 80 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland, it seems fair that they should have 80 per cent. of the expenditure for leaflet distribution—four to one, because they were in the talks and because they represent 80 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for North Antrim accused me of being wrong earlier, but he was wrong about several matters. He was wrong about decommissioning: the agreement makes it absolutely clear that decommissioning is to happen within two years. He was wrong about the RUC and wrong about how the assembly works—in fact, he is generally wrong and one of the reasons he is wrong is that he did not stay in the talks and argue his corner. The only point on which I do agree with him is that we should let the people decide. Let us hope that, on 22 May, they give the settlement and the agreement a resounding yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland Negotiations (Referendum) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 20th April, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 20th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Secondary Schools (North Wiltshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

12.8 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the burning issues relating to secondary education in my constituency and to alert the Minister to a crisis that may occur soon unless urgent action is taken.

Despite its image, my constituency is not primarily a rural area. More than half of my constituents live in the four towns of Malmesbury, Wootton Bassett, Corsham and Chippenham. Those are fast-progressing, fast-expanding towns—more akin to the other towns along the M4 corridor than are the more rural parts of north Wiltshire. That can be seen in the growth of the primary schools. In Chippenham alone, three new primary schools have been opened in the past eight years, and soon another will need to be opened to cater for the very many children in the town.

The primary school sector needs significant new investment, but, unquestionably, the area where investment is really needed in north Wiltshire is secondary schools, which have not kept pace with the rapid population growth in the area. That failure to keep pace prompted my request for this Adjournment debate.

Of the three local education authority secondary schools, only Corsham is roughly the size that it should be, although even there it is projected that, by the year 2000, there will be a shortfall of about 80 places, growing thereafter until, by 2003, we shall have a shortage of a couple of hundred in Corsham. However, it is in the other three towns—Chippenham, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett—that especially urgent action is needed if we are to avoid a crisis of under-provision in the area.

The trouble appears to be that Wiltshire's strategic education planning has never addressed projected growth in student numbers until after the pupils are in place. The reason given by the local education authority for that failure to plan strategically is that it is central Government's fault. The director of education says:

> "Ideally extra places would be provided when a shortfall is predicted, not when it becomes actual. Funding arrangements by Central Government do not allow for this. They allow for demand a maximum of three years hence to be satisfied, but during that period demand in an area such as North Wiltshire will be growing."

That, of course, is true. The population in the area is growing so fast that allowing the local authority to plan only three years ahead is inadequate. The Minister might like to ponder whether "predict and provide" may have a useful role to play in a place such as north Wiltshire, where predictions are exceptionally clear.

It may be useful if I briefly lay out the problem in each of the three main towns, and then suggest a few possible solutions to those problems.

It is predicted that, in Chippenham, there will be a shortfall in secondary school places of some 130 by the year 2000, of some 360 by 2001, and of an increasing number thereafter. There are two absolutely excellent grant-maintained secondary schools in Chippenham—the Sheldon school and Hardenhuish school, both of which are already full to capacity. The head and chairman of governors are very worried that they may have to put up with many mobile classrooms from the local authority between the year 2000 and 2001, if plans to build a third school in Chippenham are not implemented.

The curious thing about mobile classrooms is that they appear to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once one has a mobile classroom on one's site, it seems to remain for ever and become a permanent classroom—and, curiously, the number of children seems to expand to fill the mobile classrooms available. Hardly surprisingly, therefore, Hardenhuish and Sheldon are very reluctant to have mobile classrooms on their sites.

In any case, both those secondary schools are at the north of the town, and most of the expansion is in the Pewsham estate, in the south of the town, which is where the local authority had been planning the third secondary school. The people of Chippenham rejoiced to hear local authority plans to open a 450-place secondary school in September 2000. That was promised by the local authority in November and December 1997—not least at a public meeting in Chippenham, which I attended.

However, by about Christmas time, the Lib-Lab pact that currently runs Wiltshire county council suddenly became enamoured of the Thatcherite principles behind the public-private partnership initiative—or the private finance initiative, as I still, in my old-fashioned way, tend to think of it. Naturally, we were delighted that they were so pleased to take up that Thatcherite principle. We were also pleased to hear that, last week, the Government announced £100,000 to help the council with that PPP bid.

I was glad that the consultants appointed by the county council advised that using the PPP for the new school for Chippenham was perfectly possible, but I was slightly astonished to hear from the county council, when I met some councillors last week, that they advised that such a PPP project was likely to provide a higher quality of school than traditional funding methods would.

I find it hard to imagine a Labour Government being content that private funding for a state school would provide a higher-quality school than a state-funded project. Perhaps the Minister will reassure us that, if a school were to be built using traditional funding methods, the quality of the school would be as high as it would be if private funding were used.

The county also concluded that the capital works needed in the other two towns, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett—about which I shall say more in a moment—were more likely to attract a suitable PPP partner if they were bundled up with Chippenham. The upshot of that decision was the announcement last week or the week before that the much-needed new school for Chippenham would not be ready in September 2000, and that 2001 was the earliest date at which the PPP package could be in place.

Perhaps the Minister will consider whether the PPP package could be hastened, so that the school can open by September 2000. If not, some 130 pupils will be bussed around Wiltshire in the interim year. They may go to Corsham—although the county seems to have ignored the fact that its school will be full by 2000—or perhaps to Calne, some five or 10 miles away from Chippenham. The county might even close a local special school, Allington—which has a current roll of only 40 or so boys—and put the 130 school-less secondary children there.

It is hardly surprising that the rejoicing about the school's opening in September 2000 has rapidly turned to sincere anger on the part of parents in Chippenham. They have brought significant pressure to bear on me, and I am pleased to raise the matter with the Minister in this Adjournment debate. It is unacceptable in this great modern age—the education, education, education age—to be bussing children from a progressive town such as Chippenham to neighbouring market towns, or putting them up temporarily in a disused special school.

The county has a site available—despite the fact that two "fat boy" bombs were discovered on it just before Christmas. They have been cleared successfully and the site is now available for the school. Until Christmas, the county was confident that traditional methods of finance were in place to pay for the school by 2000. It should be possible to find a way of ensuring that the school opens by then.

The only strong argument in favour of the PPP bid is that the other two portions of it, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett, may stand a better chance of being brought forward in time. Their need is very great—although perhaps not quite so urgent as that of Chippenham. The Malmesbury school is presently located on two sites situated a mile or two apart. The lower school is found on the Filands site, and the upper school is situated on the Corngastons site. That is a wholly unacceptable situation these days, which cannot possibly be cost effective.

There is an overwhelming argument in favour of bringing the school together, probably on the Corngastons site—there have been representations recently that perhaps Filands would be better, but that matter will be decided in due course—and selling the other site for housing, which north Wiltshire badly needs. However, I plead that the land not be sold for the construction of an out-of-town shopping centre of any kind, which would ruin the vibrant high street in Malmesbury. If the school is located on one site and the other site is sold for housing, the project should be more or less self-financing.

Wootton Bassett is also convincing proof of the LEA's lack of strategic planning for school numbers. Bassett is close to Swindon, and has grown exponentially in recent years. It already has 22 mobile classrooms, many of which are more than 20 years old. I have visited them, and many are falling to pieces. There are currently 1,370 pupils at the school, of whom only 1,000 are in permanent classrooms. The county is projecting a further shortfall of 40 places by 2000 and 130 by 2003. Thereafter, it is predicting that the school will grow to house 1,800 children on that one site. Some urgent capital action is definitely needed to ensure that they can be housed appropriately.

The picture that I have painted depicts an imminent crisis in Chippenham—with secondary children being bussed around—and, although the problems in Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett are less acute, they are none the less just as pressing in reality. It seems to me to be wrong to lump the third school in Chippenham with the projects at Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett. The need in Chippenham is more urgent.

I suggest to the Minister and to Wiltshire county council education authority that the Chippenham school should proceed with all due dispatch using traditional funding methods, and that they should stick to their publicly expressed intention to complete the school by September 2000. The funding of the project may require assistance from central Government, and I hope that the Minister will be able to comment—either tonight or during further discussions between his officials and the county, which I will happily help to arrange or participate in if that would be useful—on the likelihood of that assistance being forthcoming.

I understand that the capital borrowing permission for 1998–99 was in place last December, but that a surprise cut of 30 per cent. by the Government in 1997–98 levels was a contributory factor in the LEA's decision to delay the project and to fund it as a PPP. Will the Minister please consider reinstating the 30 per cent. that the Government cut from the basic needs borrowing permission, so that the project may proceed to the original time scale?

Will the Minister further confirm that there need be no lowering of standards among buildings financed by the traditional method, compared with those financed by the PPP?

If the third school in Chippenham goes ahead at an early date using traditional funding methods, that would leave the Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett part of the PPP bid, which would still probably amount to some £10 million—surely large enough to attract suitable private funding.

If that were too small on its own, other urgent projects in the primary school sector, such as the Kings Lodge and Charter primary schools in Chippenham, perhaps the Malmesbury primary school, the Lydiard Millicent primary school which is on a site split by a road, or the Ashton Keynes primary school, where two thirds of the children are in mobiles, could be added to it. Perhaps the Minister will comment on the likelihood of success of such a mixed secondary-primary PPP bid, which I believe would be a first in the nation.

The county is grateful for the £900,000 help for Wiltshire under the new deal announced last week. Crudwell and Christian Malford primary schools will benefit from it. However, the sum is a drop in the ocean compared with the £3 million that the county demanded, and is £100,000 less than it achieved last year. The new deal is not a particularly great help for the county.

I am concerned that the PPP bid may not succeed, however it is configured. The Minister may want to give some thought to that, and tell us the likelihood of traditional finance being available, especially for the Chippenham school but also for the other two, if we are unable to find a PPP partner.

It would not be possible to leave a debate on education in north Wiltshire without referring to this year's settlement. The Minister will not be surprised if I do so. No doubt I have that in common with most of the local authority representatives who have spoken to him over the past few months.

In Wiltshire, school budgets have been cut by 2 per cent. in real terms. An increase of 0.8 per cent. was needed to pay for the full-year effect of the 1997–98 pay award, and a further 2.6 per cent. to meet the 1998–99 pay awards and inflation. A total cash increase of 3.4 per cent. was required. Only 1.4 per cent. was forthcoming, which means real and damaging cuts in the standard of education offered in Wiltshire.

Many schools are operating a deficit budget already. There will be redundancies in the county. IT will be curtailed. There is no repairs or decoration budget at all.

[Mr. James Gray]

Money for books and equipment is frozen or falling. The Minister constantly speaks of a 5.2 per cent. increase for Wiltshire, but that is a wholly misleading use of statistics. The reality is a cash cut, as I have described.

North Wiltshire is a prosperous and fast expanding area. I am not alone in the county in sensing a looming crisis in the provision of secondary education in the area. I hope that the Minister, together with Wiltshire county council, will take urgent action after this evening's debate avoid such a crisis.

12.23 am

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on securing this debate to consider the situation affecting schools in his constituency. He has drawn to the attention of the House his concerns about the potential difficulties facing a new secondary school in the southern part of Chippenham and raised issues related to revenue funding and the 5.2 per cent. increase that the Government have made available to schools in Wiltshire for the current financial year.

I shall comment briefly on the revenue settlement. The 5.2 per cent. is for the first time a real-terms increase that Wiltshire county council has received. An Adjournment debate at this time of the evening is not a good time to make party-political points, but I must say that the Government have done their part by providing that real-terms increase. If the hon. Gentleman and schools in Wiltshire are concerned that the money has not found its way into schools, it is right that the issue should be taken up with the county council. If the county council reconsiders its decisions in the next few weeks, it may feel able to allocate more funding to schools. Certainly the Government have made the money available, and it is our intention that it should find its way into schools in Wiltshire generally, and in north Wiltshire in particular—the schools represented by the hon. Gentleman.

The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's speech concerned the capital situation; that is the issue which I shall take up in particular. Before I do, I wish to compliment the schools in north Wiltshire on the good standards that they are already achieving. One of the benefits of a debate of this sort is that it provides a Minister with an opportunity to examine in some detail the schools in a certain area. That has been possible given the briefing that I have received from my officials. Over the past few days, I have had the opportunity to note the relative performance of schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

As the Minister for School Standards, it is appropriate for me to compliment the majority of schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which are doing well and providing the standards that the Government want. I pass on my congratulations and best wishes to head teachers, governors and parents with pupils attending the schools, given the excellent work that is clearly being done.

The hon. Gentleman raised particular concerns about the need for a new secondary school in Chippenham and the need for changes in both Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett. I shall refer to those three proposals.

I need to say clearly that any proposal for a new secondary school in Chippenham will have to come to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for approval. There is a statutory process that has to be followed. Nothing that I say this evening in any way prejudges or prejudices the decision that will eventually be taken by the Secretary of State if an application is made for a new secondary school in Chippenham. The application will require the approval of the Secretary of State, and if objections are made during the relevant two-month period, it will be for my right hon. Friend to come to a determination one way or the other. It would be wholly inappropriate to prejudge the situation before the Secretary of State has had the opportunity to consider any objections. There may be no objections, but if there are my right hon. Friend will need to consider them in an unbiased way.

I need to make clear that when the Government consider the needs of a growing population, that is reflected in our capital allocation process. We do not consider the factor in terms of what is happening now; the Government plan ahead, and effectively we have a four-year horizon, during which we shall consider the need for new places in an area. We have done that in respect of Wiltshire.

We have considered growth, as outlined by the hon. Gentleman. It is clear that this is a part of the country where, over the next few years, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman outlined, there will be population growth and an increase in pupil numbers. We need to plan ahead to ensure that the potential difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman referred do not occur. That is exactly what the Government intend to do.

We do not intend to stand to one side and watch a crisis develop in the Chippenham area where at the beginning of the new century children will have to be bussed to secondary schools. We must consider carefully the steps that can be taken now and in the near future to ensure that that does not happen.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about temporary accommodation. He is absolutely right. Temporary accommodation often becomes permanent. Those of us who visit schools, either in our constituencies or in other parts of the country, are well aware of temporary buildings that remain in place after many years—indeed, many decades—of use.

I was particularly pleased when it came to round two of our new deal for schools. We were able to make some capital allocations to ensure that temporary accommodation would be replaced by high-quality alternative accommodation. We shall continue to pursue that policy as we enter subsequent rounds of the new deal for schools. Over the life of this Parliament, about £2 billion extra will be used to improve school building stock.

We give local education authorities the flexibility to decide exactly how to allocate our annual capital guidelines. We do not tie the guidelines to specific school projects, although when an LEA applies for funding we expect it to tell the Department exactly how it will make best use of the money. It is important for local democracy to allow LEAs the freedom to determine their own priorities, and we do that within the annual capital guidelines. We have adopted a different approach in the new deal, in that we fund specific school project applications by LEAs.

A specific concern about Chippenham's proposed third secondary school close to the Pewsham estate relates to the two "fat boy" bombs that were discovered just before

Christmas. People were worried that the cost of removing the bombs would have to be met from the original pathfinder budget for the new school.

I am sure that the hon. Member for North Wiltshire will welcome the fact that my colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions have told Wiltshire that it will consider meeting the cost of disposing of the bombs through the Bellwin scheme, which was introduced many years ago by Lord Bellwin to deal with emergencies affecting local authority expenditure. My colleagues at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will carefully consider the adoption of an equivalent to the Bellwin scheme to cover the additional costs arising from the finding of those two unexploded bombs.

The main issue raised by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire is the possible delay on the Chippenham school as a result of its becoming part of a public-private partnership. I fully understand his concerns. The Government's desire to promote such partnerships, to which we are committed as an alternative source of funding for our schools stock, should not in any way delay Chippenham's third secondary school. We appreciate the need for the school and we want to ensure that nothing delays its development if it is approved by the Secretary of State.

We note Wiltshire's recent decision to bundle the Chippenham secondary school with proposals affecting Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett. I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's concerns. He correctly said that we have reserved £100,000 to help Wiltshire develop the project under the second round of the new deal initiative.

Many local education authorities do not have the in-house expertise to pursue public-private partnerships, and that is one of the reasons for the setting up in my Department of the schools private finance team. It consists of a group of people with expertise in private finance, and I am more than willing to offer that expertise to Wiltshire to support and assist the county in developing a new private-public partnership.

Because time is of the essence, my team will contact Wiltshire before the end of this week to arrange a meeting, within days rather than weeks, to discuss with the county council how urgent progress can be made in developing the public-private partnership arrangements to cover Chippenham, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett. I believe that progress can be made and that this project can become an exciting example of the public-private partnership approach that we want to be developed.

The hon. Gentleman compared the quality of buildings funded under the traditional annual capital guidelines with those funded through public-private partnerships. I must make it clear that, whatever the source of funding, the Government want high-quality school buildings. We have been concerned about the quality of school buildings and we need to take steps to ensure that when we spend public money we get value for the taxpayer. We are looking critically at the way in which local education authorities spend the capital that is given to them by central Government. All too often—perhaps due to lack of experience—they do not secure value for money. Any pound that is mis-spent or spent inefficiently is a pound less for raising standards in our schools.

The Government have a good deal of sympathy for the case made by the hon. Gentleman. We are keen to develop public-private partnerships and we support Wiltshire's public-private proposals, which is why we have reserved £100,000 to help fund the development costs of the project. We commend Wiltshire's enterprise and want to give all possible assistance to ensure that the project is successfully concluded. I am, therefore, more than willing to offer the support and guidance of the Department's private finance team to help Wiltshire achieve its objectives.

Our endeavours to promote public-private partnerships must not be at the expense of the third secondary school in Chippenham. It would clearly be unacceptable to delay that school by a year. We shall give Wiltshire all the support that we can to develop that public-private partnership quickly, but we are not wedded to dogma, so if insufficient progress is made within the timetable we shall consider alternative proposals. We shall need to look into traditional methods of funding to ensure that the school in Chippenham opens in September 2000.

The Government intend to discharge their responsibilities to the children of north Wiltshire, to raise standards and to provide high-quality education. We want to do that for the children in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and for children across the country. I hope that, in responding positively to the debate, I have been able to show the Government's commitment to providing high standards and a good quality of education for all our children.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 April 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Economic Activity

1. **Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): When he last met representatives of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss matters relating to activity levels in the economy. [38241]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Yesterday, I met representatives of the Confederation of British Industry and explained the five building blocks in our economic approach: monetary stability, sustainable public finances, good trading relationships, including constructive engagement with Europe, encouraging and rewarding work and improving British productivity.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it true that the CBI is forecasting in the current year a 3.25 to 3.5 per cent. increase in exports and a substantially greater figure next year of nearly 5 per cent. in exports? If that is true, does it suggest that the indicators are contradictory on the problem of the exchange rate?

Mr. Brown: It is true that the CBI is predicting a 3 per cent. rise in exports and a 4.8 per cent. rise in the year after. It is also true that it is predicting a 1.3 per cent. rise in manufacturing and a doubling of that in the year after that. The Government will pursue the long-term strategy that is necessary to achieve stability. We will not return to the stop-go, boom-bust years which we saw under the Conservatives.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Chancellor acknowledge that, a few years ago, manufacturing industry was growing at around 4 per cent. and at least this year many commentators suggest that there will be a fall? When will the right hon. Gentleman set a clear timetable for British membership of the single currency on the ground that it will help to eliminate the very boom and bust that industry is facing and that he is so keen to squeeze out of the economy?

Mr. Brown: The worst thing that any Government can do is to react to short-term conditions by making a long-term decision for the future of our country purely to get out of a short-term position. We have set down our policy. We have made a principled commitment to economic and monetary union. We have said that there is no constitutional barrier to joining, and we have already started making preparations to do so. We have said that, subject to a referendum of the people, we will consider making a decision early in the next Parliament. That is the right decision for Britain.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Does the Chancellor accept that the best way to ensure balanced and moderate growth in activity is to encourage savings? Does he also recognise that the worst way to encourage savings was to attack existing savings schemes and impose a £5 billion a year tax on pension funds?

Mr. Brown: I do not accept what the right hon. Gentleman said. The biggest potential attack on savings was the pensions policy pursued by the right hon. Gentleman before the general election. We are creating the climate in which savings and investment for the long term will be made. We are creating economic stability in this country, which is the best climate for savings and investment. We have reduced the deficit from £23 billion to £3 billion this year—a substantial reduction—with sustainable public finances for the long term. We are taking measures such as the introduction of the individual savings account to encourage savings in our country. It is the Conservative party's policies that would destroy investment and savings.

Mr. Lilley: How then does the Chancellor explain that in his Red Book he is forecasting that the savings ratio will decline over the coming year? He has said that he is against boom and bust. Whatever he says, we have the onset of a recession in manufacturing, at least before the end of this year. Is he not the first Chancellor to have given us boom and bust simultaneously with bust in manufacturing and booming services?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman is now trying to rewrite the laws of economic arithmetic, and I suspect that I know why: he wants us to forget the position in the late 1980s when the savings ratio was negative and the Conservative party created a situation in which there were 15 per cent. interest rates, 10 per cent. inflation and 11 per cent. wage rises. We are not going to return to that. Judging from the policies that the right hon. Gentleman wants to pursue, it seems that he has learnt nothing and remembered nothing.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Chancellor aware that we all admire his fixity of purpose, but that there is concern about the welfare-to-work programme in my constituency, which has the highest unemployment in the south-east? The programme is the flagship of the Government, and if divesting monetary policy to the Bank of England, as he has done, were to lead us into recession, would that not make it very difficult for the welfare-to-work programme to deliver?

Mr. Brown: The welfare-to-work programme is already delivering. It is creating conditions in which every young person who has been unemployed for more than

six months has new opportunities for work and training. Instead of sneering, it would be better if the Conservative party started supporting the welfare-to-work programme.

As for monetary policy, we have made the right decision for the long term. That is one of the reasons that long-term interest rates in this country are now the lowest they have been for 33 years.

Exchange Rates

2. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What recent representations he has received on the exchange rate of sterling. [38242]

18. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What assessment he has made of the effect of the current value of the pound on his long-term objective of economic stability. [38261]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I understand the concerns of exporters, but an even greater worry would be any risk of a return to the boom and bust that we experienced in the late 1980s.

Mr. Boswell: The Chancellor took the decision to increase taxes on savings more than those on consumption, and also connived at the fudged criteria for the euro, which will weaken that currency. As he has by those two actions compounded the consequences of his hasty decision to hand over responsibility for monetary policy to a group of bankers and economists, does he not feel just a little isolated in suggesting that he has no personal responsibility for the implications of the current exchange rate for manufacturing industry and, increasingly, on the economy more generally?

Mr. Brown: That is a very interesting position being adopted by the Conservative party's trade and industry spokesman. The hon. Gentleman now says that he is against independence for the Bank of England. I therefore assume that the Conservative party would repeal the legislation, and we should now have a statement from the shadow Chancellor to that effect.

Mr. Williams: Does the Chancellor agree that the 1979–81 recession, during which 2 million manufacturing jobs were lost, was caused by an overvalued pound, when the pound was a petro-currency, and that the 1990 to 1992 recession was likewise caused by an overvalued pound which stood at DM2.95 in the exchange rate mechanism? I welcome the 4 per cent. drop in the value of the pound against the deutschmark in recent days, but does he agree there is still a long way to go, and that, unless we have a realistic and sustainable exchange rate, we will not have the stability for which he is working so hard?

Mr. Brown: I understand entirely. As my hon. Friend hints, the question asked by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) was formulated when the pound stood at DM3.10, whereas it now stands at DM2.98. The Government's aim is a stable and competitive exchange rate over the medium term. We are not going to get into devaluing the pound continually in the long term, because we need to pursue the long-term road to high productivity. That is the way to ensure the industrial and export success that this country wants.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Chancellor accept that it is not only some manufacturers who are suffering because of the high level of the pound but that agriculture in particular is suffering enormously? Agriculture faces competition from low-cost imports, and suffers an inability to export because its products are being priced out of markets. Given the other pressures on agriculture, cannot something be done as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Brown: The main reason that agriculture is in difficulty is the bovine spongiform encephalopathy mess left by the previous Government. The right hon. Gentleman knows that we have already provided an extra £85 million this year to help agriculture. That is in addition to measures that we took previously and, indeed, some that have been taken since. As for the effect of the pound on industry in general, in Wales and elsewhere, exports are still rising in a considerable number of sectors. The right hon. Gentleman may have seen yesterday's figures, which show that employment in the manufacturing sector has been rising over the past three months, too.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is it not clear that the prime determinant of sterling is the level of interest rates? As the Monetary Policy Committee is split 4:4, should not my right hon. Friend remind the committee that it also has responsibilities for the economic situation in the country, as he pointed out in his instructions to it? As there is no certainty as to what the committee is thinking, should he not remind the committee of this—or perhaps he has done so already?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend who, as a former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and a Minister in the last Labour Government, is an expert on these matters. When he reads the minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee—this is an open process, in which the voting, the minutes and the inflation report are published—he will see the factors taken into account by the Bank of England.

The elusive policy in this country over the past 30 or 40 years has been long-term stability in place of stop-go. When we came to power, we found that inflation was rising way beyond the target set by the previous Government. That is why we took the necessary long-term action. Although I understand the concerns of exporters, they will agree, on reflection, that the biggest worry—which we are determined to avoid—is that we will return to the stop-go policies which have disfigured this country in the past.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am sure that farmers around the country will be interested in the Chancellor's analysis that wheat prices have gone down because of the BSE crisis. On the exchange rate, he has repeated his normal mantra that we want a stable and competitive pound. Which of these two desiderata is more important? As the Chancellor knows from what has happened over the past few months, it is possible to have a reasonably stable and uncompetitive pound. Which is more important—stability or competitiveness?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman's question was framed in his mind before the movements in the exchange rates over the past few days. He says that the exchange rate has been stable for a long period, but it was

DM3.10 only a few days ago and it is now DM2.98. I repeat that our aim is a stable, competitive pound in the medium term. However, in the circumstances we face, everybody should take a long-term view—the Government, by creating stability; industry, by planning for long-term investment; and the financial community, by avoiding a resort to the short-termism of the past.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The steelworkers at Shotton in my constituency now find it more difficult to export their product because of the standing of the currency, but they can see that it is cheaper to buy in some of their materials. Does my right hon. Friend know that British Steel nationally finds it hard to compete abroad, particularly because some of its competitors in the European Union are cheating by employing illegal subsidies?

Mr. Brown: In an attempt to improve the workings of the single market and end unacceptable subsidies, we have proposed a programme of economic reform in the EU. My hon. Friend makes a good point that import prices have been reduced substantially in recent months. I should add that two thirds of the rise in sterling took place under the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Chancellor listened a moment ago to a rather pessimistic picture put forward by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams), yet he was happy to agree with a very optimistic picture put forward by the Confederation of British Industry. Which one is right?

Mr. Brown: I met the CBI last evening—the fourth time I have done so since the election. The CBI understands very well that the policy of stability to which we are committed is the best policy for the country. Of course I understand the concerns of exporters expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr, but my hon. Friend would agree that it is important to make the right long-term decisions for the country. We have made those decisions, such as the one giving independence to the Bank of England. I wait to hear the view of the Opposition.

Economic and Finance Council

3. **Mr. Hugh Bayley** (City of York): If he will make a statement about the outcome of the ECOFIN meeting in York. [38243]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): As president of ECOFIN, I hosted the informal meeting of European Finance Ministers and central bank governors in York from 20 to 22 March. I am grateful to the city of York, which my hon. Friend represents, for the hospitality that was provided and the marvellous reception that delegates received. The agenda for the meeting covered critical issues facing the European Union—its enlargement, economic reform and the implications of the financial and economic situation in Asia.

Mr. Bayley: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks about my constituency. Does he agree that Britain's influence in the European Union is growing because of the constructive role that the Government have played in the United Kingdom presidency? Did he think that the ECOFIN meeting in York was more successful because the Government's policies contrasted with the policies of isolation and drift of the Conservative Government before the election? Finally, did he and his fellow Ministers enjoy their time in York?

Mr. Brown: Indeed we did. Some delegates reminded me what happened when, under the Conservative Government, they arrived in Bath for an informal meeting and some things went wrong.

Britain is leading the agenda for European economic reform. We proposed the Luxembourg conference on employability, which led to significant advances, including employment action plans from each country, and we are now proposing the same reforms for product and capital markets. I believe that we are making considerable advances in the agenda for economic reform, which is vital for the future of Europe, and I am grateful to York for providing the facilities in which many of these decisions were considered.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): At the ECOFIN conference in York, did the Government not completely cave in on the Maastricht criteria for entry into the single currency? Is that not scandalous? What is the point of the criteria, if no one believes in them or complies with them? Does that not call into question the Government's tests for economic credibility on sterling's entry into the currency?

Mr. Brown: No. The convergence criteria of the Maastricht treaty were not discussed at York.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at the next ECOFIN meeting in Austria, he will find many prices—for books, beer and wine—posted in euros as well as in Austrian schillings? The Conservative party is terrified of the fact that all other European parties of the right now back the euro. In the interests of stability, will he join me in welcoming British Steel's decision to pay its bills in euros and the fact that the Vauxhall workers have today voted to accept a pay deal that will link their pay to the stability that is offered by the euro? Is that not the right way for British business to go?

Mr. Brown: Yes. The difficulty that we faced when we came to power was that, because of the divisions in the Conservative Government, so few preparations had been made for the introduction of the euro. The Government are encouraging the legal changes that make it possible to trade in euros—when I met the Confederation of British Industry last night, I was told that that was one of the measures in our first 11 months that has encouraged it.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Why is it that, four months into the right hon. Gentleman's six-month chairmanship, there is still no agreement on the presidency of the European central bank? Is that another hard choice that is being fudged along with the rest of the Maastricht criteria, or is he waiting for the Prime Minister to sort out the stalemate that has arisen because of his flawed chairmanship?

Mr. Brown: I am glad that, from the Opposition Front Bench, we now have a positive and constructive interest in matters European and in who is appointed president of the European central bank. As I reported after Monday's meeting, the decision must be made by July, which is when the central bank comes into being—I expect the decision to be made in May.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Was the proposed abolition of duty-free sales within the European Union in July 1999 raised in York? If not, will my right hon. Friend undertake to raise the matter at the next ECOFIN meeting on 19 May, bearing in mind the fact that the European Parliament has unanimously called—there were no dissenters—for an urgent study before September of the implications of the abolition of duty-free sales on jobs and on economies throughout the Union?

Mr. Brown: The issue of duty-free could be reopened only if there was unanimity in favour of doing so. That is the European Union position. There is not such unanimity, and we are dealing with the implementation of a decision that was agreed by the previous Conservative Government.

Belgium (Government Debt)

4. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What assessment he has made of Belgium's compliance with the Maastricht convergence criterion on Government debt as a proportion of gross domestic product. [38244]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The European Monetary Institute and Commission convergence reports provide a comprehensive assessment of the degree of convergence of member states against the treaty criteria and of the importance of economic reform. Those and all factors will be taken into account, and Finance Ministers will also make a statement on fiscal stability and economic reform.

Mr. Brady: Had the Chancellor given a straight answer, he would of course have said that both Belgium and Italy have debt at more than twice the level that is acceptable under the convergence criteria. Does he accept that allowing the euro to go ahead without proper convergence of the 11 currencies is one of the reasons why it will be a soft currency, and that the value of sterling will be forced up still further? Does he share my concern that the prediction of the north-west chambers of commerce, that manufacturing in the region will go into recession this year, will come true because of his policies on the matter?

Mr. Brown: I do not think that what is happening to manufacturing industry this year has to do with what the hon. Gentleman says about Belgian debt. The Government, as chairman of ECOFIN, will listen to all member states. We are studying the reports of the European Monetary Institute and the Commission, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will announce later today an opportunity for hon. Members to debate those matters either on the Floor of the House or in Committee before 1 May.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): The Belgian Government deficit and debt ratio have declined significantly since 1993, showing a clear downward path, in accordance with the convergence criteria. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservatives' misrepresentation of what is happening in other European economies is a clear attempt to undermine the single currency and make it fail, regardless of the consequences for Europe in general and our economy in particular?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who rightly points out the change that has taken place in the diminished Conservative party since the general election. Before 1997, Conservative Members were opposed to Britain joining a monetary union; now they seem to be opposed to anybody else joining it. They are not fit for government. They are not fit for opposition.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): When making a similar assessment for the United Kingdom to the one that he has made for Belgium, how does the Chancellor intend to assess sterling's record on stability and the appropriate level for it to enter a single currency? When the exchange rate mechanism is effectively disbanded on 1 January 1999, will he consider any type of exchange rate policy for the pound with respect to the euro?

Mr. Brown: As I said before, we have no intention of rejoining the exchange rate mechanism. I set out the economic tests that we will apply to membership of European monetary union, and they include the five tests that I announced in my statement in October.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): With 17 million unemployed in the Community countries, what sense is there in those countries being actively encouraged to pursue acute deflationary policies that can only further increase unemployment? I for one am not an enthusiast for the Maastricht criteria, which were negotiated and warmly endorsed by the previous Government.

Mr. Brown: There is no evidence that high inflation and unsustainable budget deficits have produced higher employment. We have to consider what action countries throughout Europe can take to deal with unemployment. I find it encouraging that countries in Europe are following Britain's example in having a welfare-to-work programme and tackling the problems of youth and long-term unemployment. I look forward to progress in reducing the unacceptably high unemployment right across Europe.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Has the Chancellor read the Bundesbank report to the German Government, which—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Well, he should have, because it records not only that Belgium and Italy have more than twice the permitted level of debt for joining the single currency but that, on their published plans, they have no chance whatever of getting down to the permitted level within the next 10 years. Why does the Chancellor not produce his own authoritative report on the fudging and fiddling that are going on? Why is he simply waving the whole project through in a weak and indecisive way, despite the damage to our currency and the excessively high value of the pound, about which he seems not to care?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman makes a point about the Bundesbank report as if it has come out against those countries' membership of the single currency. It has done no such thing. On his policy on the entry of Italy, Belgium or any other country, it is interesting to note that the Conservative party now seems to be against anyone joining economic and monetary union.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that news of a prospective recession due to a soft euro does not fit with the facts that the exchange rate is moving down, that the *Financial Times* reports today the prospect of interest rates peaking and moving down and that we have the lowest level of benefit claimants for 17 years? That is hardly a recession.

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. The progress that we can make in reducing unemployment and getting into work people who have been either registered as unemployed or who were never registered as unemployed in the Conservative years should be welcomed by everyone.

On the movement of exchange rate and interest rates, the Bank of England makes it clear in its inflation report that action had to be taken to deal with incipient inflation in the economy. It has taken that action and will meet next month to review the position.

Retail Prices Index

5. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will estimate the cumulative increase in the retail prices index as a result of increases in petrol and diesel duty rates since 1992. [38246]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): Since January 1992, petrol and diesel duties have added around 1.75 per cent. to the RPI compared with a cumulative increase in the headline RPI of around 18 per cent. over the same period.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. Is she aware that the recent rise in petrol is the third in only 18 months and that the new Labour Government have increased the road fuel escalator, which, together with bringing forward the Budget, has raised another £9 billion in taxation from the British people? Is she aware that the announcement of £50 million for rural transport in the Budget is a pittance that will have no impact in most rural areas, where there is no meaningful public transport and never can be? What is she going to do to help the people of those areas who are suffering from additional taxation that was not promised by the new Labour Government?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is suffering from amnesia. His Government supported the fuel escalator. Indeed, when the previous Chancellor increased it, he said:

"Any critic of the government's tax plans who claims to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy."

I agree with the previous Chancellor.

On the subject of hypocrisy, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it is this Government who have invested in rural transport, committed £500 million to transport over the next three years and come up with a plan for London Underground—unlike his Government, who did nothing at all.

Budget (Work Incentives)

6. **Mr. John Hutton** (Barrow and Furness): If he will make a statement concerning his Budget measures to increase the financial incentive to work. [38247]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Budget contained a number of measures to help ensure that work pays, including the working families tax credit and reform of national insurance contributions.

Mr. Hutton: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I strongly endorse his emphasis on making work pay, a central element of the philosophy underlying our welfare-to-work review. Is he aware that 1,500 families and 3,000 children in my constituency will benefit from the introduction of the working families tax credit? Is that not one of the best ways to achieve greater fairness in our society—something that, in 18 years in government, the Conservative party conspicuously failed to do?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The increased take-up and availability of the working families tax credit to people on low incomes will mean that the number of people benefiting will increase from 800,000 to nearly 1.4 million. It also means that the marginal tax rates of many of those people will subsequently fall. My hon. Friend is right: this is part of a comprehensive set of measures, including the national minimum wage, cuts in national insurance for employees and employers and a child care package, that enable people to have proper child care when they need it. It will eventually include the 10p starting rate of income tax.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): How will the tax rises implemented by the Government since 1 May help people's financial incentives to work? What did the right hon. Gentleman mean when he said during the general election campaign:

"There's no black hole for the Labour party because we've got no public spending commitments that require extra taxes"?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should be congratulating the Government. We cut VAT on fuel after saying we would. We abolished the gas levy and helped people with their fuel bills. He asks about taxation. We cut corporation tax for business, we cut small business corporation tax, and we have now cut national insurance for every employee in the country. We have kept our promises on tax. The Conservative party broke all its promises on tax.

Budget Effects

7. **Ms Sally Keeble** (Northampton, North): What assessment he has made of the impact of the Budget on families with average earnings of £16,000. [38248]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): A single earner couple with two children both under 11 will see a real increase in their disposable income of about £10 a week.

Ms Keeble: Is my hon. Friend aware that the £16,000 litmus test was in fact set by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) in his speech to the House on 18 March? Can she confirm that her figures show that all the average families in my constituency, who are, exactly as the right hon. Gentleman said,

"with a couple of children and a mortgage, who contribute to a personal pension and own a car"—[*Official Report*, 18 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1312.]

will find their personal finances more secure as a result of the Budget?

Dawn Primarolo: The Budget helps low-income families. The working families tax credit will mean that every family with a member working full time will be guaranteed an income of at least £180 a week. The Labour Government are tackling the problems—the barriers to moving from benefit into work and the problems of low pay—unlike the previous Government, who were prepared to see families consigned to poverty.

Windfall Levy

8. **Mr. Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): What discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on his policy to spend the windfall levy on an extension of the welfare-to-work programme. [38249]

12. **Gillian Merron** (Lincoln): If he will make a statement on his policy of spending the windfall levy on an extension of the welfare-to-work programme. [38253]

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson): We have had extensive discussions with our EU colleagues about how to equip our young and long-term unemployed people with the skills that they need to find and keep work. Promoting employability is a key policy objective of the EU employment guidelines agreed last November, and it was endorsed by G8 Finance and Labour Ministers meeting in London in February. I am pleased to report that our new deal policies have been received enthusiastically in both the EU and the G8. I am sure that the whole House would like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the initiatives that he has taken in all these respects.

Mr. Cranston: I thank my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend for taking the news of this brilliant programme to other parts of Europe. I should like my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend to meet the 200 young people in my constituency who now have a chance of decent employment as a result of the programme. Now that the programme has gone nationwide, what are the early indications of its success?

Mr. Robinson: The only people yet to be convinced about the seriousness of our intent and the success of the programme are cynical Conservative Members. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that, on his pathfinder project in the black country, which I had the privilege to visit, 2,467 people have joined the programme and 158 have already found work. Most important, three quarters have gone into unsubsidised jobs. That is most important for the eventual success of the programme. We have made a good start. It is too early to make an overall judgment about the whole programme, but it is clear that we have started well, and we are continuing to make progress in all the pathfinders across the country.

Gillian Merron: I welcome the extension of the new deal in the ways that were announced in the Budget. They were asked for by people in my constituency, and that is an indicator of the success that we can expect in tackling unemployment. How will the new deal for communities help places and people who daily have to battle with poverty, difficulties and deprivation?

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that we have continued to extend the moneys and the areas covered by the new deal. We have put £50 million more into the gateway programme, which is one of the most important new developments in the new deal. We have found £100 million for the long-term unemployed over-25s. We have a £60 million programme to help partners of the unemployed to give them access to employment opportunities that they did not have before. In all those ways the community will clearly benefit.

I shall take this opportunity to tell the House how active my hon. Friend has been in making a success of her new deal programme in Lincoln. She convened a meeting involving all the partners to the programme and, as a result, eight private sector companies have signed up. Opposition Members should take a similarly involved and active interest. We expect 17,000 companies to have signed up to the new deal programme within the next three months. It will be a big success despite Opposition Members, not thanks to them.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I commiserate with the Paymaster General on his not being Prime Minister, and hope that he will explain whether he thinks that, at the end of this expensive welfare-to-work programme, unemployment will be lower than it is now.

Mr. Robinson: If there is to be any commiseration in the House, it should be extended to the hon. Gentleman, and I commiserate with him.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): How does the Paymaster General define a windfall?

Mr. Robinson: I define a windfall tax as one that we exacted on the privatised utilities that were sold grossly below their value because of the incompetence of Conservative Members. The £5 billion that we raised from that is being put to good use.

Economic and Monetary Union

9. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on progress towards the introduction of EMU. [38250]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Preparations for the launch of stage three of economic and monetary union have continued throughout the UK presidency of the EU. In the presidency, the Government are committed to ensuring that the single currency is launched smoothly and on time, taking into account the views of other member states.

The key decisions on which member states will join the single currency will be taken over the first weekend in May on the basis of the Commission and European Monetary Institute reports.

Dr. Cable: Does the Economic Secretary acknowledge that, as EMU is now proceeding with 11 members, there is some risk of the remaining four being excluded from key economic management decisions in Europe? As the Government have declined to accept our advice on proceeding with early entry and an early referendum, will the hon. Lady set out the sort of conversations the Government had with Greece, Denmark and Sweden to ensure that they are not marginalised on economic policy making?

Mrs. Liddell: We failed to take the hon. Gentleman's advice because, on this as on other matters, it is consistently wrong. The hon. Gentleman asks about the applicant countries for the euro zone. The decision on that will be made next week in full consultation with all member states over the May bank holiday weekend. During our presidency we shall do our utmost to ensure that the decision is taken in an orderly and smooth manner.

Mr. Charles Clarke (Norwich, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that the real meaning of the reports by the European Commission, the European Monetary Institute and the Bundesbank, is that economic and monetary union will go ahead from 1 January 1999 with 11 members? Does she agree that it is about time all parties in the House, including both Conservative parties, faced that fact and accepted it and addressed the real implications for this country of that change?

Does she further agree that one of the implications may be that, from 1 January 1999, the euro will circulate more widely in the United Kingdom than people, including those in the Treasury, currently expect? I cite the example that was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) about today's Vauxhall pay negotiations. Does she accept that it is necessary for the Treasury to address more urgently the possible implications of the euro spreading in this country faster than most people expect?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend is unnecessarily generous to Opposition Members. I thought that there were singularly more than two—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, not singularly. I thought that there were multiples of views on Europe on the Conservative Benches.

My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the progress that has been made towards convergence. For example, average EU inflation fell from about 4 per cent. in 1993 to an estimated 2 per cent. last year. The point that my hon. Friend makes about companies' preparations in this country for the use of the euro after 1 January 1999 contrasts with the myopic attitude of the Conservative party, which refuses to accept reality and, because of the attitude that it adopted when it formed the Government, held back companies' preparations.

As part of the Government's preparations, the Treasury has established with the Department of Trade and Industry an EMU preparation unit. Several road shows are being held throughout the country. A considerable amount of material is now being made available to businesses—especially small and medium enterprises—and the provision of such material will continue and escalate once the decisions are taken next weekend.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): As it is generally agreed that the success of EMU will crucially depend on the quality of whoever is appointed as president of the European central bank, is it not disquieting that, despite the clear provisions of the Maastricht treaty that the central bank, when established, shall not be subject to national pressures of any kind, both Germany and France obviously regard it as essential to their national interests that their nominees should be appointed governor of that bank?

Is the Economic Secretary aware of the widely reported horse-trading going on between Germany and France, to the effect that whoever is appointed, whether the French or German nominee, will agree to step down after four years—despite the fact that the Maastricht treaty lays down that it should be an eight-year term—to make way for the nominee of the other great power? Is that not an augury of the way in which Europe will be run in future; Germany and France will stitch everything up behind the scenes and then impose their wishes on the smaller countries?

Mrs. Liddell: I am tempted simply to say no, but I shall make the point that there is no German nominee for the presidency of the European central bank. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said, the president of the central bank must be in place by July. We shall do our utmost to ensure that the decisions are taken in an orderly manner in due course, and we hope that those decisions will be taken soon.

Association of British Credit Unions

10. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What discussions he has had with representatives of the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd. [38251]

19. **Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What plans he has to modify the regulations governing the financial transactions between credit unions and their members. [38262]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Credit unions play an important role in encouraging savings and providing low-cost credit. I have met the Association of British Credit Unions to discuss its ideas for strengthening the credit union movement and plan to see the association again soon. We are examining ways to promote the further growth of

credit unions by easing some current restrictions while continuing the movement's current focus on the less well-off. We will announce our intentions shortly.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful for that reply. Does my hon. Friend agree that credit unions provide an especially valuable service to people on a low income who live in areas from which the high street banks have withdrawn? Will she assure the House that the Treasury is committed to furthering the growth of credit unions and will actively consider proposals from the Association of British Credit Unions to allow, for example, credit unions to borrow capital from external bodies other than banks and to offer a broader range of financial services to their members?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We are examining the proposals that he mentions. Credit unions play a significant role in helping the low paid. We are developing that approach as we seek to eliminate the social exclusion caused by the previous Government that has resulted in many people not having access to conventional financial services. Access to financial services can be a route out of poverty. I commend the work done by many hundreds of people throughout the United Kingdom in operating credit unions.

Mauritius Mandate

11. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): If he will make a statement on the Mauritius mandate. [38252]

17. **Mr. Tony McNulty** (Harrow, East): What recent representations he has received on his policy to reduce the debt burden of the poorest countries. [38260]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Government have made considerable progress in securing international agreement to the Mauritius mandate and will continue to press for its speedy and determined implementation. Since his Mauritius mandate statement to Commonwealth Finance Ministers last September, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has held a number of meetings with religious leaders and non-governmental organisation heads to discuss the issue of debt relief and keep them informed of progress.

Dr. Starkey: May I pass on to my hon. Friend the considerable support that I have received from my constituents for the effective action that the Government are taking to reduce the debt burden on poorer countries? Given the importance of reducing debt to allow the poorest countries to develop more effectively, and because of the wider effect on the world economy, what steps are the G7 countries taking to monitor progress in achieving those targets by 2000?

Mrs. Liddell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that question. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members sneer, but the Treasury has received many thousands of letters supporting the Government's position on the Mauritius mandate. The G7 countries issued a statement on 21 February encouraging all debtor countries to begin the process of securing debt relief by the year 2000, and they continue to monitor that progress. In addition, six countries will benefit from HIPC—heavily indebted poor countries—relief: Uganda, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Guyana, Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique. I commend the many thousands of people throughout the country who have kept the issue to the fore, despite the laughter of Opposition Members.

Mr. McNulty: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is little point in seeking to alleviate debt unless we tackle the systemic and structural difficulties in those economies to allow them to develop through sustainable growth? Can she confirm that the measures taken to alleviate debt will set out a way in which those countries can achieve sustainable growth?

Mrs. Liddell: I commend my hon. Friend for that question. It is important that we encourage Governments to develop sound economic policies so that in future they do not return to their present condition. That is why the programme is biased towards countries that clearly exhibit a determination to adopt sound economic policies. We will encourage them in that and give the support that is necessary, both in our role as the UK Government and through our role in G7 and other international organisations.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the Minister confirm that the money necessary to relieve the debt of the poorest countries is taken from the overseas aid budget? Can she say when the Government expect to make progress on increasing to 0.7 per cent. of gross national product aid to the poorest countries of the world, as promised?

Mrs. Liddell: I do not confirm the hon. Lady's point about the overseas development budget, but we have given extra assistance to the African development bank. In relation to specific countries—for example, Mozambique—where there is a particular problem because of the scale of the debt, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has brokered a significant deal. As a result, maximum assistance is being given to Mozambique to ensure that it can meet its debt obligations and find an exit from its debt, in line with the other countries involved.

Budget Effects

13. **Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): What representations he has received on the impact on the number of families facing marginal deduction rates of 50 per cent. or more of the measures announced in his Budget. [38254]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): None.

Mr. Baldry: Does the Minister accept that written answers to parliamentary questions show that a staggering 320,000 families face marginal deduction rates of 50 per cent. or more? Is that not a demonstration of how the Budget will extend the poverty trap, and a rotten way of going about welfare reform?

Mr. Darling: We have received no representations along the lines the hon. Gentleman suggests, because the vast majority of people recognise that our proposals for working families tax credit will help substantially more

people than were assisted under the family credit scheme. We have reduced by two thirds the number of people who pay marginal rates of more than 70 per cent. For the first time, no families will pay marginal rates of more than 100 per cent. Most people recognise that it is an extremely useful measure that will make work pay and help reduce barriers to work. That and the reduction in national insurance rates announced by my right hon. Friend are major reforms of the tax and benefit systems, which have been widely welcomed by most progressive-thinking people—but I accept that that does not include the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the Chief Secretary accept that he is right to say that the Budget marks an historic shift away from welfare being a prison in which millions of people are forced to double their incomes simply to earn £5 more a week and in which half a million people are better off by working not at all or less, such was the stupidity of the welfare system that, we inherited from the Tories? Does he accept also that, because of the high rent increases for which the Conservative party was responsible in both the public and the private sector during the 1980s and early 1990s, we must look forward to the review of housing benefit and to a clear policy of restraining rent increases to deliver millions more people from the welfare traps that we inherited from 20 years of Tory rule?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend highlights the fact that the Government are looking across the full range of the benefit and tax systems to ensure that people are not penalised as he describes. We will ensure that people can get into work and, when they do, that it pays. That is the whole point of the Green Paper on the future of the welfare state, which we published recently. My right hon. Friend was quite right to draw attention to the fact that the Government are committed to modernising the welfare state so that it is fit for the labour market and the social and economic conditions that we have today, rather than those that might have been appropriate 50 years ago.

"Financial Statement and Budget Report"

14. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): If he will list the number of corrections made to the most recent "Financial Statement and Budget Report" since 17 March. [38255]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): A corrigendum was issued on Budget day and a further written answer was given in reply to a parliamentary question on 27 March making the necessary alterations.

Mr. Ruffley: Does the Chief Secretary accept that, while the revisions have the direct effect of artificially massaging down the national tax burden, the burden on ordinary families is increasing? Does he accept House of Commons Library figures that show that a family on average earnings is £1,000 a year worse off under this Government as a result of mortgage rate increases and tax increases—yes or no?

Mr. Darling: I think that the hon. Gentleman was a special adviser to the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. He might wish to bear in mind two things when considering whether people are worse off. Under the previous Government—despite their promises at the previous general election—people were substantially worse off because of the tax increases introduced by that Government.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right: we did issue a corrigendum, but at least we were not in the situation he was in when he advised the former Chancellor. The former Chancellor did not have just to correct the figures three years ago: he had to correct his whole Budget when he was defeated on value added tax on fuel.

Economic and Monetary Union

15. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (North Essex): If it is the Government's policy to support the inclusion of all 11 applicant member states who wish to be included in the third stage of EMU on 1 January 1999. [38256]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Government are considering the Commission recommendation in consultation with other member states. We note the considerable progress made towards convergence in the 11 countries. For the economic benefits of economic and monetary union to be realised, it will be important that this progress is maintained in future, with further action taken to reduce deficits and to reform markets.

Mr. Jenkin: May I congratulate the Government on the influence in Europe that they now believe they have? May I ask the Minister how the Government will exercise that influence? Will they support the participation of Italy and Belgium in the monetary union, or are the Government still awaiting instructions from European institutions, France and Germany?

Mrs. Liddell: This Government do not take instructions from other member states. The Scrutiny Committee has already been in touch with the Government about the opportunity to discuss these significant issues. I expect that an announcement will be made in due course. During the next week we shall consult other member states, which is the mature and sensible way in which to proceed.

Interest Rates

16. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the role of the Bank of England in setting interest rates. [38258]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee sets interest rates to meet the Government's inflation target of 2.5 per cent.

Mr. Fabricant: Interest rates drive the value of the pound. Is the Minister happy with the value of the pound?

Mr. Darling: There are many, many factors that influence the value of the pound. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman, in case he was not listening earlier, that the Government are determined to take whatever action is appropriate in the long-term interests of the economy. We are not prepared to see a recurrence of the boom-and-bust economy, which has been so damaging in the past. We—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not like being reminded of the fact that, during the 18 years when they were in power, they were responsible for two severe recessions. The second was one of the deepest this century.

The Government are determined to avoid that happening again. That is why we took the necessary steps to reform the Bank of England. We now have one of the most open and transparent central banks in the world. The important point is that we now have the lowest long-term interest rates for 33 years.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, throughout this Question Time, and in particular in questions to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Tories have been talking about a competitive pound? They have been talking also about the value of the pound, but they have never said that they are in favour of a weak pound.

The truth is that no one—representing any party—would get elected to this place if he said to the electorate, "Vote for me and I will introduce a weak pound." That is the truth of the matter, and people must face it. On 16 September 1992 the Tories chose to go for a weak pound. The net result was that they were defeated on 1 May 1997. The same thing happened to previous Governments.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend that he should not listen to the moaning Minnies on the Conservative Benches talking about a weak pound or a competitive pound; remember that devaluation does not win elections.

Mr. Darling: Indeed it does not. My hon. Friend is right. We have heard this afternoon that the Conservative party has no idea what its policy is on a host of issues, whether the pound, taxation or the future of the Bank of England. The only thing that unites an increasing number of Conservatives is their bitter hostility to anything to do with Europe.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I ask the Leader of the House for next week's business.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): The business for next week will be as follows.

MONDAY 27 APRIL—Consideration in Committee of the Finance (No. 2) Bill (first day).

TUESDAY 28 APRIL—Consideration in Committee of the Finance (No. 2) Bill (second day).

WEDNESDAY 29 APRIL—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House. That will be followed in the afternoon by consideration in Committee of the Finance (No. 2) Bill (third day).

THURSDAY 30 APRIL—Until 7 pm, there will be a debate on economic and monetary union on a Government motion. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 1 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows.

MONDAY 4 MAY—A Bank holiday. The House will not be sitting.

TUESDAY 5 MAY—Second Reading of the Competition Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 6 MAY—Until 2 pm, there will be the usual debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House. That will be followed in the afternoon by remaining stages of the Scotland Bill (first day).

THURSDAY 7 MAY—Proceedings on the Tax Credits (Initial Expenditure) Bill. That will be followed by remaining stages of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill.

FRIDAY 8 MAY—There will be a debate on Hillsborough, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that, on Wednesday 29 April, there will be a debate on bathing water and water policy in European Standing Committee A.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Wednesday 29 April:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 12591/97 and (b) 6177/94, Bathing Water; (c) 7531/97 and (d) 12929/97, Water Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: (a) HC 155-xii (1997-98); (b) HC 48-xx (1993-94), HC 48-xxiv (1993-94) and HC 70-xiii (1994-95); (c) HC 155-ii and HC 155-xiv (1997-98); (d) HC 155-xiv.

Thursday 30 April:

Floor of the House—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 7161/98, European Monetary Institute: Convergence Report; (b) 7188/98, Commission Report: Euro 1999. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-xxiv (1997-98).]

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. As I have made clear, we are glad that she has managed to make three days available on the Floor of the House for consideration of the Finance (No. 2) Bill. The rearrangement of business to allow consideration of the Scotland Bill is also welcome.

The right hon. Lady said at the last Business Questions before the recess that she would consider making Government time available for a debate on foreign affairs. As I pointed out then, we are more than halfway through Britain's presidency of the EU, and there have been important and significant developments in foreign policy, not least in the middle east, and human rights issues. I am sure that she will agree that it is time that we heard from the Foreign Secretary and had an opportunity for a debate.

When does the right hon. Lady intend to publish the Bill on the registration of political parties? It is becoming increasingly farcical that the House is asked to debate constitutional issues without knowing the content of that important Bill.

Will the right hon. Lady arrange for the President of the Board of Trade to make a statement on payments to her private office from a blind trust and from the Industry Forum? I hope that the right hon. Lady will resist the temptation—which she does not always successful do—to reply with counter-accusations, because these are serious matters.

We are talking about Ministers, Members of a Government elected amid many fanfares about openness, whose Prime Minister said that his President of the Board of Trade will abide by the rules, and a party whose general secretary was reported in the press as telling the Neill committee that all blind trusts had been wound up. It would be helpful to the House and to the cause of open government if the President of the Board of Trade would explain just what the current position is regarding the funding of the right hon. Lady's office.

Will the right hon. Lady ask the Minister of Agriculture to come to the House to make a statement on the Government's ban on beef on the bone? Not only has the ban proved deeply unpopular with the public, including at least one bishop, but the legislation putting it into place has been questioned.

It is worth asking whether the legislation might have been better had the Minister of Agriculture bothered to attend his own debate when the ban was introduced, instead of lolling about in the Smoking Room. I have much sympathy with the right hon. Lady's difficulties in getting any Agriculture Minister to come to the House, given that one of their debates had to be answered by an Education Minister, which was not appreciated by the farming community throughout the country. Beef producers and the beef industry have the right to know just where they stand in the light of this week's legal developments.

Would the right hon. Lady like to confirm that the terms of reference of the BSE inquiry make it clear that it is an independent inquiry? Does she agree that it should be independent? Will she remind the Prime Minister that his repeated statements in the House show that he for one has prejudged the outcome of the inquiry?

Will the right hon. Lady arrange for a statement on the Government's policy on equal representation for men and women in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, and in particular clarify whether the Lord Chancellor is right to say that the proposal is illegal?

Mrs. Taylor: I shall try to deal with all the points that the right hon. Lady has raised. As I said on Monday, I am

[Mrs. Taylor]

pleased that we were able to accommodate the request for three days in Committee to consider the Finance (No. 2) Bill. As she pointed out, I have said when we shall be taking the day that we missed yesterday on the Scotland Bill.

The right hon. Lady asked when it would be possible to have Government time for a foreign affairs debate, in particular to discuss some EU matters. We shall be discussing some EU matters in the near future. With regard to a more wide-ranging foreign affairs debate, the programme is very busy at the moment, and will remain so certainly until Whitsun, but I am looking for an opportunity for a debate on foreign affairs, or some aspect that would be of particular interest to the House.

I hope that the Bill on the registration of political parties will be published shortly. The right hon. Lady will know of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's offer to discuss that Bill with other parties in the House, so as to try to proceed on the basis of agreement as much as possible.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was in full compliance with the rules of the House with regard to her blind trust, and she has made it clear in a public statement that that blind trust will be wound up in the near future. I do not think that there has ever been any question that she has broken any of the rules of the House.

With regard to beef on the bone, the right hon. Lady will be aware that Agriculture questions will be on Thursday, and I remind her that the legislation to which she referred was approved by the House. She mentioned that at times Agriculture Ministers are not available in the House. That did happen on one occasion, and I gave the explanation. I am sure that, as a former Minister of Agriculture, the right hon. Lady appreciates the demands on the time of any Agriculture Minister, especially on EU matters.

With regard to prejudging the BSE report, I simply repeat what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday—that we should take notice of scientific and medical advice. It is only a shame that the previous Government did not do so in the way that this Government are doing.

The Government will take no lectures from Opposition Members on equal representation for men and women.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend is a nice mum, and looks after the interests of her family. Will she find time during the coming week to consider a debate on the growing numbers of children, some as young as five, who have been excluded from schooling? That does not solve the problem for anyone except the school. It is frightening that not a great deal of effort is being made to get large numbers of children back into education. That is a worrying matter.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to say that the problem of exclusion causes concern. It is an issue which has grown in recent years, for a variety of reasons. My hon. Friend will know that the Department for Education and Employment and the social exclusion unit at No. 10 take the matter seriously, and I know that Ministers are extremely committed, as are many teachers, to tackling the problem, minimising exclusions and trying to bring back into education those children who, for a variety of reasons, have particular difficulties. However, I cannot promise a debate on the subject in the near future.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the House of Lords report on the use and misuse of antibiotics? Will she arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to make a full statement to the House outlining the Government's intentions on the matter?

The Leader of the House may be inclined to say that that is not necessary because a press release has been issued, but I invite her to agree with a view which is widely held in the House, that there has been an increasingly blatant bypassing of the House in the statements given to the press and the media by the Government.

Will the right hon. Lady make time available for a debate on the environment? That will give the official Opposition an opportunity to state whether they support the efforts of a former Conservative Minister to wreck various environmental Bills being put forward by private Members tomorrow.

Mrs. Taylor: Opposition Members can sort out the problem raised by the hon. Member's last point. We should like to have debates on a range of issues, including the environment and many others, and the Modernisation Committee has spent a little time considering the problem of how to find time for them.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the House of Lords report on antibiotics. Health questions take place next week. However, he must be realistic about what he expects from the Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health put out a press release welcoming the report and sharing the Committee's concern, and also said that, in due course, he would provide a full response to it. He has not done anything other than welcome the report and acknowledge that there is a problem. That cannot be described as bypassing the House.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the other parties that were involved in the change of business to enable progress to be made yesterday on important matters relating to Northern Ireland. When will time be made available for the next legislative steps relating to the peace process?

Mrs. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I share his appreciation of the agreement, and the assistance that was provided by other parties in the House on the legislation. It is too early to say precisely when further legislative measures will be taken, but I welcome the comments of the leader of the Conservative party and others on their willingness to co-operate on those issues. It is important that the House acts on a multi-party basis, so far as is possible, on Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Will the Leader of the House reconsider her answer to my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House on a debate on foreign affairs? Does she recall that a Minister from the

Department for Education and Employment made a statement to the House announcing the expenditure of £45 million on new lavatory facilities for children? After a successful visit to the middle east, it is apparently not possible for the Prime Minister to make a statement to the House on matters that touch on the strategic, political and commercial interests of this country, which are of the first importance. Does she agree that such bypassing of the interests of the House is wholly unacceptable to my right hon. and hon. Friends, and will she please do something about it?

Mrs. Taylor: Madam Speaker, you said yesterday that it was for Ministers to decide, after considering the circumstances, whether it was appropriate to make a statement to the House. We must consider on each occasion the time that we would take from other business, and such decisions are not always easy to make. This is a matter of judgment. The attitude of Ministers towards informing the House when important matters have been raised has been extremely good. It is not necessary for the Prime Minister to make a statement to the House after every visit, however successful it might have been.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Can my right hon. Friend find time to debate the management of private Members' Bills, especially given the prospect of the wrecking by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) of Bills on energy efficiency, on minicab licensing and on waste minimisation, which are crucial to all of us, especially Londoners? The policies are apparently supported by the Opposition, despite the activities of that rogue parliamentarian.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not mean that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst was a rogue—a parliamentarian, perhaps.

Mr. Geraint Davies: I accept your interpretation of my meaning, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Taylor: I think that we know what my hon. Friend meant. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst has been active in that respect. He must answer for his actions, especially if he is blocking Bills which have widespread support in the House and in the country.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I support the call by my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames) for an urgent debate on foreign affairs? This is a matter of priority.

I recently visited Egypt with Labour Members and Members from my own party. Having had a lengthy and worthwhile meeting with the President and the Foreign Minister of that country, I believe that Egypt is playing a major part in seeking to take the peace process forward. While Britain holds the presidency of the European Union, it is critical that hon. Members should be able to make representations to the Government on the importance of the peace process and the part that can be played by the United Kingdom, which has such knowledge of and such a history of involvement in that area of the world.

Mrs. Taylor: I am glad that so many Conservative Members appreciate the initiative taken by the Prime Minister, but I really do have nothing to add to what I said earlier about the need for statements. I did say that I was looking to find time for a foreign affairs debate, but it certainly is not possible in the next two weeks.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I am sure that my right hon. Friend read with alarm the results of a recent survey that said that a significant number of people arrested on assorted offences were on drugs. Can she tell us, or give us any indication, when the Government's White Paper on drugs is likely to be published?

Mrs. Taylor: I know that that is an issue of concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House. We will publish that White Paper next week. On present plans, we anticipate that it will be published on Monday, with a statement in the House.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will possibly have heard the news that one of the people on the Parades Commission in Northern Ireland has resigned, apparently on the ground that he could not face the pressures of the media. Those of us who know how he has dealt with the media can suspect only that he might be joining those who show some economy with the truth. In the light of the request of the shadow Leader of the House about independent inquiries, would it be possible for someone to come to the House and explain how independent an independent commission is when it seems to react to letters from the Prime Minister?

Mrs. Taylor: It is important to make it clear that the Prime Minister did not tell the commission what to do. It was a matter for the commission to decide when it would publish its report and, on this occasion, it happened to agree with the Prime Minister. He did not know even the contents of the report, so there is no suggestion of the Prime Minister undermining the commission's position, although it is a problem if individuals get a great deal of pressure from the press. I do not think that anyone would think that that would be desirable in the circumstances.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): Over the Easter weekend, there was some severe flooding in Leamington Spa in my constituency, causing millions of pounds worth of damage to private and commercial properties. We were grateful for a visit from the Deputy Prime Minister, which happened very quickly, but there are outstanding issues to be dealt with in the aftermath: financial assistance for local authorities that are now dealing with the consequences, and whether the warning systems were adequate. Will we have any statement on this subject, or will there be time for a debate on the issue?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend will know that the Prime Minister assured the House yesterday that local authorities and others that face extraordinary claims due to the flooding would be able to make claims under the Bellwin scheme. On the point about warning systems, my

[Mrs. Taylor]

hon. Friend may know that the Minister of Agriculture has asked the Environment Agency for a full report on the events and on any lessons to be learned. That may be of help to my hon. Friend and to others who are concerned about the matter. It might also be possible for him or others to apply for an Adjournment debate, so that they can highlight some of the problems, and perhaps some of the lessons that need to be learned.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Given the significant local government elections on 7 May, would it not be courageous if the Government arranged a debate on local government before then? We could then consider, among other things, the recent letter to *The Guardian* by the Labour spokesman on social services on Oxfordshire county council, Tom Richardson, who expressed anger that the county council had to cut benefits and help for disabled people and their carers in Oxfordshire more savagely in the first year of a Labour Government than at any time in the county council's history.

Having to respond to hundreds of letters and telephone calls from disabled people in Oxfordshire, he wrote in *The Guardian* that he felt that all he wanted to do was dump the whole lot on the desks of Blair, Brown and Prescott and say, "Do your own dirty work." Perhaps it would be good if the Government gave us an opportunity to hold them to account on how they have dealt with local government in their first year.

Mrs. Taylor: We have already had debates on the settlement this year.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Can the Leader of the House tell us when the Human Rights Bill will return for further discussion, and whether there will be a long gap, or any gap, between Royal Assent and the enforcement of the legislation?

Mrs. Taylor: We have had requests to take the Committee stage of the Bill on the Floor of the House. That inevitably causes some delay when other business is scheduled. I am hoping that we will be able to make progress before very long. I cannot recall the details of the commencement orders, but I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): May I take the Leader of the House back to her response to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) seeking further clarification on the subject of beef on the bone? Her response was to suggest that we should raise these issues at Question Time. With no disrespect to the House or to Question Time, that may not be the best vehicle to explore some of the detailed points raised by the Selkirk judgment.

The Leader of the House may not have had an opportunity to read that judgment, but it cast doubt on the legality of processes such as chilling or cooking of beef, because the sheriff said that people did not know where they stood as a result of the way the legislation was drafted; and he said that, in his view, it was defective.

Is it not time to ask the Minister of Agriculture or his Minister of State to come to the House and make a clear statement on where people stand on the issue of beef on the bone? If that does not happen, we will have a continuing recipe for chaos and confusion.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman ought to recall the fact that, following the judgment, leave of appeal was given. I am surprised that Opposition Members are so insistent that the Government should ignore medical advice. Only today, we have seen reports in the newspapers of yet another tragic death of a young person from CJD. That reminds us all that we are well-minded to take the medical advice, and to err on the side of caution.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Tory Members did not mention that person who died so tragically.

As we are approaching the 50th anniversary of one of the greatest blessings the country has ever had—the creation of the national health service by a Labour Government, against fierce Tory opposition—I hope that my right hon. Friend will provide time for a debate on what the NHS has done for the people of our country. Perhaps, at the same time, that debate will provide an opportunity to pay tribute to the Minister who introduced it, one of the most dedicated and talented of all the British democratic socialists this century.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes a strong case, and I have had requests on other occasions for a debate on the health service. I hope that it will be possible to find an opportunity in the not too distant future, but, as I have explained, the programme is very full, and it will certainly not be possible in the next couple of weeks.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the right hon. Lady bring forward to the earliest opportunity the debate on the draft Cathedrals Measure dealing with governing bodies and financial provisions? Those of us with cathedrals in our constituencies are concerned about it. We would like to see the debate held not after 10 o'clock but in prime time, particularly in view of the unfortunate circumstances over at Westminster abbey, of which we are all too painfully aware. Can the right hon. Lady ensure that we have an opportunity to amend that draft legislation to consider whether the abbey should no longer be a so-called royal peculiar, but subject to the same regulations of the deans and chapters as everybody else?

Mrs. Taylor: I would not claim to be an expert on the detailed measure to which the hon. Gentleman referred. He knows the pressures on time. I will look at the draft measure, but I cannot give him any guarantees at present.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Is the Leader of the House aware that, at a press conference this morning, two Ministers pledged to introduce legislation as soon as possible for the licensing of minicabs in London? As an attempt to do that is likely to be blocked tomorrow by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), can she tell us exactly when this urgent matter of public safety in London will be discussed, and when the legislation will be introduced?

Mrs. Taylor: I am certainly not willing to anticipate events tomorrow, and the right hon. Gentleman to whom the hon. Lady referred must answer for himself.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): We attach considerable importance to the annual report on human

rights published earlier this week. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is a great shame that Ministers were not able to make a statement on that report, and will she find time for us to discuss it on the Floor of the House? I draw her attention to page 36 of the report, which states that Britain will encourage those states which have signed the Ottawa convention to ratify it as soon as possible. As Britain has not yet ratified it, will she find time for that important process to take place, so that we practise first and preach later?

Mrs. Taylor: Again, the hon. Gentleman is aware of the pressure on our time. I referred to the Bill that will incorporate the European Convention on human rights into our law, and perhaps some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised will be relevant to the debate on that Bill.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we signed the Ottawa convention in December. He will also know that we intend to ratify it as soon as parliamentary time allows for the passage of the necessary legislation. We want to ratify it as soon as possible, but he will appreciate that the timetable is very crowded at the moment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that we are coming to the end of the time allowed in the parliamentary year for private Members' Bills, will the Leader of the House make a statement on what the Modernisation Committee intends to do about the timetabling problems for those Bills? Will she consider the possibility of increasing the time available on a Friday, so that we can have two Second Readings on that day? Will she consider the possibility of using some Wednesday mornings to debate private Members' Bills instead of using them all for Adjournment debates? Will she also consider having more Committees to take account of those Bills? That would resolve some of the problems that we have experienced for many years, and it would be a modernising feature from the Government which would go down very well.

Mrs. Taylor: In every Parliament, there are private Members' Bills that attract a great deal of support and arouse a great deal of emotion, and there are many that people would like to see reach the statute book. The rules that govern the time available for private Members' Bills are set out by the House itself. The Modernisation Committee has made it clear that it will at some stage want to consider the matter.

My hon. Friend raises one especially important point. If we give extra time to one aspect of the work of the House, we lose time for another, so we always have to balance the rights of all hon. Members. Of course, the Modernisation Committee may well turn its mind to this issue, and I am sure that in doing so it will bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Garnier: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is well able to look after himself, and would no doubt have done so had he been informed in writing, in advance, by those hon. Members who wished to criticise his conduct and motives. Perhaps the hon. Members who criticised him are ignorant of the customs and practice of the House, but will you take this opportunity to remind hon. Members that, if they wish to criticise the conduct and motives of any hon. Member, which they are perfectly free to do, they should observe the courtesy of informing the victim of their attacks beforehand?

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Is it a similar point?

Mr. Stunell: Yes. I hope that you will take note, Madam Speaker, that some of us did indeed notify the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) before we spoke.

Madam Speaker: It seems that the point of order has been dealt with on my behalf.

BILL PRESENTED

Tax Credits (Initial Expenditure)

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Secretary Harriet Harman, Mr. Alistair Darling, Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson and Mrs. Helen Liddell, presented (under Standing Order No. 50 (Procedure upon bills whose main object is to create a charge upon the public revenue)) a Bill to authorise the incurring of expenditure in connection with the replacement of certain social security benefits with income tax credits: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 178].

Royal Air Force

[Relevant documents: The Fifth Report of the Defence Committee, Session 1996–97, on Heavy Lift (HC 233) and the Government's response thereto (HC 153 of Session 1997–98).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

4.3 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): It is an honour and a privilege to open this afternoon's debate on the Royal Air Force, particularly in its 80th anniversary year. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I express the gratitude of Parliament, the people and many overseas for the stalwart work of the RAF in the past eight decades. It has been a testimony not only to its strength and adaptability, but to the commitment that RAF members have shown in the service of their country. It is also fitting that we are debating this gallant service on St. George's day, and I hope, Madam Speaker, that the House will forgive a Scot his temerity in alluding to that fact.

Many hon. Members who will speak in the debate will wish to make particular reference to the strategic defence review, but, given that this is a single service day, it would not do the RAF justice if I did not spend the bulk of my introductory remarks referring to its activities throughout the year. If I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, I shall refer to the comments made on the wider strategic context when I wind up.

The eight decades of the RAF's existence are short compared with those of its illustrious sister services. However, the junior service has a gallant and heroic place in this country's history during the 20th century. From the dark days of the second world war—when the bravery and skill of RAF pilots and crews helped to secure our freedom—it has been apparent that no modern conflict can ignore the importance of air power.

The long-distance air strikes during the second world war which struck a blow at our enemies proved that air power was here to stay. However, we also learned then that air power has a humanitarian face. While they were delivering fatal blows to our adversary—in a manner that has been well publicised—the aircraft of Bomber Command were carrying out a less aggressive, but no less vital role; dropping more than 7,000 tonnes of food to starving Dutch civilians.

The House will recall many such episodes, but one other anniversary deserves a special mention today. Fifty years ago next month, the Berlin airlift began. It was unprecedented for a beleaguered city, surrounded by hostile forces, to be sustained entirely by air, month after month. More than 2 million tonnes of supplies were flown into Berlin, nearly a quarter of which were carried by the RAF and British civilian aircraft, which flew more than 300 million miles and spent more than 200,000 hours in the air. They brought more than 130,000 people out of that besieged city.

That that great undertaking was begun and pressed to a successful conclusion was a tribute to a range of people, from those who expressed the political will and determination of this nation and of western leaders—Clem Attlee and Ernest Bevin prominent among them—to the airmen who flew those hazardous missions under constant threat. We remember in particular those who lost their lives in the noble operation, because, sadly, 70 airmen were killed during the airlift, including 17 members of the RAF.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): This may be the appropriate moment to pay tribute to the flying skills and dedication of those based at RAF Lyneham, whose Hercules, of course, were the main aircraft used in the Berlin airlift.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): No, they were not.

Dr. Reid: I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) if he wishes to make an intervention.

Mr. Clark: I extend my apologies for so uncouth an interruption to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), but I rely on the Minister to remind my hon. Friend when the C130 Hercules aircraft became operational.

Dr. Reid: It is a testimony of our times that, on a great occasion, we cannot give tribute in a spirit of non-partisanship without the divisions in the Conservative party expressing themselves.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: A third view from the Conservative party.

Mr. Howarth: I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) was entirely right to mention the Hurricane's sterling work for the RAF, but, in the interests of setting the record straight, I should say that it was—I am pretty sure—the DC3 Dakota that did the job 50 years ago.

Dr. Reid: The nation has a range of Conservative views from which to pick. On a factual basis, I recommend that hon. Members agree with the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), but I am sure that we are all united in spirit in paying tribute to the courage that was shown by the RAF and its personnel during the airlift.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to join Chancellor Kohl, among others, at the opening next month in Berlin of the museum commemorating the Allied role—I, and other Ministers, hope to participate in other events marking the anniversary of the airlift.

During the eight decades since the RAF was established, the advance of technology has continually and often dramatically redefined the nature of battle. Large static armies are a thing of the past. Agility, versatility and reach are now the key characteristics of a modern armed force. The RAF is now increasingly an instrument of policy rather than only of war—its professionalism is as likely to be called on to deliver humanitarian aid to a third-world country as to give a bloody nose to a protagonist in the defence of peace and freedom.

For most people, air power is something of an esoteric concept, both mysterious and powerful. It is seen to affect our lives only when, like an insurance policy, it is called

on to pay out, or when the peace of a summer's evening is disturbed by a low flying aircraft—a matter that is constantly drawn to the attention of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who, because of the way in which we devolve power in the Ministry of Defence, deals with such important matters.

Nevertheless, air power is the cornerstone on which United Kingdom military capability is based—control of the air is, and will continue to be, the strong and resolute support of our land and sea forces. Given today's emphasis on joint and integrated operations, air power remains essential in the preservation of our national interests and a way of life that we hold dear. It enables us to deter our enemies and to secure peace and freedom for ourselves and for our friends and allies. In the past year, just as in the previous 79 years, the RAF has delivered that air power in an incomparably professional fashion.

The House need look no further than the latest tensions in the Gulf for a vivid recent example. Unfortunately, we have become used to Saddam Hussein's dangerous games of brinkmanship. In November last year, following the Iraqi regime's refusal to allow United Nations inspection teams access to several sites, precautionary military deployments had to be taken to underline our clear resolve not to allow the Iraqi tyrant to flout United Nations Security Council resolutions. Harrier GR7s from No. 1 Squadron were moved at short notice to join HMS Invincible at Gibraltar—RAF crews worked with and alongside the Navy, forming a potent force that left Saddam in no doubt about our intentions.

Although Saddam appeared to back down from the confrontation, in the new year we once again had to reinforce diplomatic ventures and efforts with a clear demonstration of military might. As the House will recall, HMS Invincible, with her joint air group, was moved to the Gulf; Tornados from No. 14 Squadron deployed to Kuwait; and Harriers from No. 3 Squadron embarked on HMS Illustrious, which in due course relieved HMS Invincible on station in the Gulf.

The Royal Air Force and Royal Navy together met the challenges of those deployments with their customary professionalism, most notably in the rapid integration of the RAF Harrier detachments aboard the aircraft carriers. The effective cross-training with United States and other forces in the Gulf was a further sign of our operational effectiveness and preparedness, as was the early adoption into service of the thermal imagery airborne laser designation pod for the RAF Harriers, although, thankfully, we were not required to put that new technology into action on this occasion.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Minister confirm that the undertaking to deploy extra Tornados was given by our Minister in conjunction with the American Ministers in Washington on the Saturday, and that, by Monday afternoon, those aircraft and all their support capability were in operational flying condition? Does that not demonstrate the superb flexibility of our front-line pilots and all the support staff in the RAF, which enables us to deploy our aircraft faster than any other air force, including, I should say, the Americans?

Dr. Reid: I can confirm the facts that the hon. Gentleman adduces. He puts the point well that that occasion provided a practical illustration of the professionalism, preparedness, commitment and skills of crew members and others in the RAF. That is what the Ministry of Defence exists to do: what really matters is the output of fighting power in practice, rather than what we have on paper.

The determination of the United Kingdom and the coalition partners to confront Saddam's intransigence, backing the diplomacy of the United Nations with the means to enforce compliance with Security Council resolutions, has been instrumental in gaining the UN Special Commission the full, unfettered access that is needed to unearth his weapons of mass destruction and the programmes related thereto.

Given Saddam's track record, it is clearly too soon to relax our vigilance. HMS Illustrious and the Harriers of No. 3 Squadron have left the Gulf, but we have increased to 12 the number of RAF Tornados at Ali al Salem air base in Kuwait, where a high state of readiness is maintained. At the same time, we should not forget the RAF detachments based in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, which continue the task, started as far back as 1991, of monitoring the no-fly zones over Iraq.

We are committed to the full and final completion of the work of the United Nations Special Commission. Saddam Hussein's horrific programmes must be clearly and unequivocally accounted for and destroyed. We have consistently made clear our determination to see the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

Britain is at the forefront of continuing international efforts to implement the chemical weapons convention, and we are working closely with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, to develop further its inspection capabilities. That included a joint practice challenge inspection at RAF Valley in Anglesey earlier this year.

We are also working closely with our allies and partners to agree effective verification arrangements for the biological weapons convention at the current negotiations in Geneva. That is a priority for our presidency of the European Union, and our aim is to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion by the end of the year.

The House will recall that we also made clear in our manifesto our commitment to the goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons. On 6 April, we ratified the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. We are working hard for the establishment of the international monitoring system called for by the treaty at the earliest possible date. We have made it clear that, once adequate progress has been made towards our goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons, we shall ensure that Britain's nuclear deterrent is included in multilateral negotiations. Only a few weeks ago, on 31 March, we withdrew from service the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb. That marked the end of an era, as it marked the end of the RAF's part in providing our nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Alan Clark: I quite see that the Minister, conscious that many Labour Members will pay attention to what he says on the topic even if they are not in the Chamber, must include in his speech passages about the WE177 and the Government's good intention to phase out nuclear weapons. However, he cannot take the risk that any international treaty for phasing out nuclear weapons will ever really work. He could not disarm this country

[Mr. Alan Clark]

on the assumption and hope that bandit countries such as North Vietnam, rogue republics of the former Soviet Union and Muslim fundamentalists would disarm themselves, knowing what we do about the way Saddam Hussein and others practise concealment.

Dr. Reid: I repeat what I said earlier. We are prepared at some future stage, if we are convinced that adequate, verifiable progress towards nuclear disarmament has been made, to play our part in it. I think that that answers the right hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): What the Minister said, both before and after the intervention of the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), does no more than reflect the obligations that this country has undertaken under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty.

Dr. Reid: Indeed. While my remarks are important to the audience to which the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea referred, they are also an exact replica of what was in the Labour party's manifesto, on which we fought the general election.

Outside the Gulf, men and women of the RAF continue to operate with the British Army in the Balkans, sustaining SFOR and providing a visible, important symbol of our commitment to the peace process. The RAF has been supporting peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia since the international community's first involvement in the region. Between July 1992 and January 1996, the RAF flew some 25,000 tons of aid into Sarajevo airport. Air operations in the Balkans range from the daily flights of the RAF support helicopter force from bases in Bosnia and Croatia in support of our ground forces to the regular flights between the United Kingdom, Germany and the theatre made by the Royal Air Force transport fleet.

We should not forget our two E3D Sentry aircraft based in Italy, which form part of the NATO force maintaining airborne early warning and control over the theatre. Those operations underline the importance of joint or integrated operations, to which I referred earlier, and the crucial role of the RAF wherever and whenever United Kingdom military resources are deployed.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): May I pay special tribute to the detachment at Gioia and the E3D detachment at Aviano, which I visited a couple of years ago when I was a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme? Their involvement with the peacekeeping operation has contributed to changing the climate in Bosnia. Those who served in Italy as part of the RAF deployment shouldered some of the burden placed on the RAF by its increasing role in international peacekeeping missions. I pay tribute to RAF men and women out in Italy who contributed to that.

Dr. Reid: I am sure that my hon. Friend speaks for many hon. Members in paying that tribute to the E3D squadron and to the wider role of the RAF, not only in fulfilling our international obligations but in respect of the United Nations' contribution to world peace. The House will be aware that we have recently redeployed six Jaguars from Italy back to their bases in the United Kingdom as a result of the improving situation in Bosnia—a situation brought about in part by the commitment of our armed forces to the region. They will, however, remain at high readiness to move, along with two Tristar tankers, to provide air support to our troops on the ground in Bosnia if required.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Minister says that the aircraft have been deployed back to the United Kingdom but will be maintained at a high state of readiness. Will he tell the House exactly what he means by that? Does he mean that they will undergo a continuing programme of intensive training or is it just a buzz word meaning that they are ready to be deployed at the press of a button?

Dr. Reid: Members of the Royal Air Force, when not in operation, normally undergo intensive training. A state of high readiness means exactly what it says. The Jaguars are at a level of readiness that would, if the political decision were taken, enable them to move at extremely short notice. When the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) alluded to the early dispatch of Tornados during the first stages of the Gulf crisis, he gave an example of what high readiness means in practice.

I have said before that it is a great privilege to hold the post of Minister for the Armed Forces, a privilege that I share with my predecessors—one of whom, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), is here. One of the great advantages of being Minister for the Armed Forces, of which the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, is having time to share and exchange views and involve oneself with, and to learn from, members of Her Majesty's armed forces on visits when they are on deployment and on exercises. In the 11 months that I have been Minister for the Armed Forces, I have been very proud to visit men and women of the RAF to learn a little of the work that they do and of the commitment that they give to it.

Only last month, I visited RAF Valley. Its role is to take young men and women who have already proved in basic training that they have the potential to make good pilots and turn them into first-rate pilots. I was deeply impressed by the skill and determination of the young people I met there and the professionalism of the instructors who ensured that the training that those young people received was second to none. I genuinely believe that what makes the difference between our Air Force and many other air forces is the skills and aptitude of the human beings who are part of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): May I raise an issue relating to personnel that has been raised with me by the Dudley branch of the RAF Association? A real concern has been raised with me about the welfare of RAF veterans. Mike Houldershaw, the officer of the RAF Association in Dudley, has asked me to ask my hon. Friend whether he has had discussions with the British Legion, and with the RAF Association generally, about measures that might be taken in relation to the welfare of veterans.

Dr. Reid: It is not sufficient to consider merely the value and the contribution that is given to this country by service men and women while they are in the services. We have to meet a reciprocal obligation to bestow some

form of benefit on them not only while they are in service but after they leave service. I have had a number of discussions on the issue, one of them with the British Legion, and we have very much in mind during the strategic defence the issue of veterans and some of the problems that they encounter.

I mentioned RAF Valley. I also had the chance recently to visit RAF St. Athan. Deep repair and overhaul of aviation equipment is a vital part of the support for the armed forces. For the RAF, this activity is currently managed through the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency at RAF St. Athan and RAF Sealand. The MOD has been considering the possibility of bringing this activity together with that conducted through the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation defence agency at Fleetlands in Hampshire and Almondbank in Perth into one agency.

I have decided, subject to the outcome of consultation, to set up a defence aviation repair agency to manage the work as a whole. That will enable us to exploit the synergy between helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft repair and to implement best practice throughout aviation defence. It will be an important step in the development of joint organisations for the delivery of defence output, which is one of the key themes being progressed in the strategic defence review. I am setting work in hand to launch DARA as a new agency on 1 April 1999 with a view to moving the organisation to trading fund status as soon as possible thereafter. The agency will be overseen by an owners board, which will be chaired by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who is in his place today.

The Royal Air Force bears its responsibilities with the professionalism and resolve for which it is renowned. In addition to its operational duties, the RAF has been engaged in many exercises with our allies worldwide. From December 1997 to February of this year, Harrier GR7 aircraft were deployed to Yuma, Arizona, for Exercise Hammer Fist, which provided an opportunity for live weapons training, low-level and operational low-level and simulated air combat sorties with United States marine and air force aircraft.

In March, I was able to observe our forces participating in Exercise Strong Resolve. That was a live, dual exercise in military response to an evolving crisis. In the north, the exercise was conducted around Norway and simulated a war scenario. Concurrently in the south, off the coast of Spain, the exercise involved a multinational intervention force at a level of combat other than war. The immediate reaction force, the rapid reaction force and the main defence force units joined other NATO forces in those simulated crises.

Nineteen main exercise and training objectives were designed to test the activation, deployment, employment and integration of the various air and land forces, especially in the context of the interface between reaction forces and regional main defence forces. The exercise was also useful in enabling us to gauge the success in practice of host nation support agreements. I am glad to say that I was joined on that exercise by four new members of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. That scheme makes a marvellous contribution not only to our relationships with the forces but to an increase in knowledge in the House when we debate defence issues.

In June, the RAF will take part in a series of tactical training exercises that will be organised by our United States colleagues and the US air force. Tornado F3, Hercules and VC10 refuelling aircraft will train with US forces in combined air operations centred on Eilson air force base near Fairbanks, Alaska, in Exercise Cope Thunder 98-3. Later that month, Exercise Distant Frontier 98 will be held at the same location and will have a similar format. However, that exercise will be organised by the UK combined air operations centre, which will generate the scenario and plan and disseminate tasking. Its involvement will also serve to establish the basis for future participation in deployed exercises and will refine internal procedures and expose personnel to deployed exercises in a coalition environment. That is becoming an increasing feature of operations.

Hon. Members may have noticed a common thread in the exercises and in the operations of our armed forces. It is the thread of interoperability or inter-operations not only between our own armed services working closely side by side to achieve a desired aim in the most effective and efficient manner, but between nations. As clearly demonstrated by the deployment to the Gulf region, the RAF is able to integrate seamlessly into a royal naval task force, to provide that additional force needed to get the job done, and done well. As I speak, Exercise Head First—an Army exercise—is taking place in Wales and the west country, whereby RAF helicopters are lending their unique support to Army land forces.

In addition to such exercises, the RAF is playing a full part in our contacts with the countries of central and eastern Europe through NATO's "Partnership for Peace" initiative. Last June saw the first participation by RAF fast jets—Harrier GR7s—in a PFP exercise with Finland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Poland, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia. Given the situation in the mid-1990s, it is a testimony to how far we have moved in the past decade that that list of names should be enumerated to the House as our partners in peace and in exercises.

Mr. Alan Clark: A short while ago, the Minister mentioned the integration of RAF personnel and naval personnel in combined operations in the Gulf. If he would throw a little light on that, it would be a great help to me and to some of my hon. Friends who might wish to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will the Minister elaborate a little on the command structure in that situation? Obviously, the relative service boundaries and their change of command are relevant in such a situation. How did the command structure work, and how did the levels of seniority interoperate, when those two services were integrated under those conditions?

Dr. Reid: As the right hon. Gentleman may know, the ultimate command structure runs through the permanent joint headquarters based at Northwood, so, instead of establishing, on an ad hoc basis, a temporary joint headquarters for each venture, for the vast majority of our overseas operations now—in fact, for the vast majority of our operations excluding Northern Ireland—the control and command system runs through the permanent joint headquarters. At the level beneath that, no blueprint is imposed irrespective of the circumstances. It depends on the objectives and on the combined weight of the various forces involved in terms of command structure and seniority.

The close-knit integration of land, air and sea forces is not only sensible but, in terms of effective fighting power and output, becoming essential in the modern world, with

[Dr. Reid]

a three-dimensional battle space. I should have thought that the classic example of that for the future, in an area in which the right hon. Gentleman has had a particular interest historically and contemporaneously, is the aircraft carrier. The aircraft carrier is at heart a floating airfield, which is not just a naval asset but a defence asset and which requires the closest integration of the sea and air elements.

I mentioned those countries of central and eastern Europe with which we have been taking part in an exercise through "Partnership for Peace". That not only enhances military skills but is, obviously, a major political initiative. In July, two Tornado F3s will take part in a PFP exercise in the Slovak Republic—Exercise Co-operative Chance. That involves setting up a multinational NATO headquarters in an overseas operational environment and is aimed at practising command and control of the air component of a peace support operation. Later in the year, there will be a return visit to the United Kingdom by Slovakian Mig 29s.

In September, we shall provide a Nimrod to take part in a search and rescue exercise in the Baltic sea. More significantly, in the same month, the Royal Air Force will be hosting a major "Partnership for Peace" exercise, code-named Co-operative Bear 1998, in Cornwall. The scenario will be based on a humanitarian mission this time, including aeromedical evacuation and air-delivered emergency aid, and we expect at least 10 partner nations from central and eastern Europe to play an active part in the exercise. Others will participate by sending observers. That is a remarkable illustration of the extent to which things have changed in less than 10 years.

In addition to its multinational activities, the RAF is playing a major part in our own outreach programme. Activities range from expert exchanges on air defence with the Czech Republic to exchanges of junior officers with the Bulgarian air force; from seminars on aviation medicine with the Russian Federation air force to participation in the Kiev air show in Ukraine; and from joint helicopter exercises in Romania to joint fast jet activities with the Russians in Scotland. One cannot get more international than that.

That combination of confidence-building measures with activities aimed at improving our ability to operate alongside our partners wherever we may be called to do so not only enhances our air force operationally but is at the heart of defence diplomacy, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done so much to promote.

Looking to the future, the former Franco-British European air group has been aptly renamed the European air group to reflect the increasing diversity of the countries participating in it. Italy is in the process of acceding to full membership alongside France and Britain; Germany is an observer nation, and we hope that Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands will accept recent invitations to become observer members with the intention of acceding to full membership in the near term.

It would be inappropriate in the present circumstances if I did not mention Northern Ireland. The recent agreement in the multi-party talks represents a new beginning—a chance of putting behind us the violence of the past 30 years—but it is just a beginning. We hope that everyone will now look to the future—the verdict of the people will be given in the referendums on 22 May.

However, while we look forward to peace, we cannot afford to relax our guard prematurely. In that context, the RAF continues to play an important role in the support provided by all three services to the Royal Ulster Constabulary in combating terrorism and maintaining law and order.

There are just over 1,000 RAF personnel serving in Northern Ireland. They provide essential helicopter support, ensuring that troops can move quickly and easily to where they are required, together with a search and rescue capability. A field squadron of the RAF Regiment provides security for RAF Aldergrove, where two squadrons of helicopters are based. Force levels in Northern Ireland are reviewed continuously to ensure that the RUC has whatever support it requires to counter the terrorist threat.

In mainland UK also, RAF personnel and equipment are regularly called upon to provide support to civil authorities and emergency services. Twice in the past 12 months, the RAF and the Army have provided invaluable assistance to communities affected by flooding—first in Morayshire last July, and then just recently, over Easter, in the midlands. They provided the usual vital help in rescuing vulnerable stranded civilians from their homes, transporting the injured to hospital and filling sandbags.

Let me draw attention to the valuable work undertaken by the RAF in response to other civil emergencies. First, the whole House would wish to praise the courage of the dedicated personnel of the RAF's mountain rescue service, a volunteer force whose members brave the most atrocious weather conditions to bring assistance to those in difficulty in some of the country's most inhospitable terrain.

I shall say no more than a word or two about the search and rescue helicopter crews, because I am sure that their valour and effectiveness are known to all in the House. Together with Royal Navy crews, they provide emergency assistance to the military and civilians alike. During 1997, RAF search and rescue assets were called out on 1,769 occasions, providing assistance to 1,289 people. I have heard it estimated that between 6,000 and 8,000 people are now walking the streets of the United Kingdom who would not be were it not for the valour and effectiveness of the search and rescue forces.

It is not only British citizens who are assisted by the efforts of the search and rescue forces. Those rescued include the 10 crew members of the Spanish trawler the Sonia Nancy, which was adrift and sinking off the Scilly Isles in atrocious weather conditions in January. The rescue involved two Nimrod aircraft and a Sea King helicopter. The Nimrods attempted to release dinghies to the trawler, but the appalling weather inhibited their efforts, and the ferocious seas tore away those few dinghies that reached the vessel. It was clear that the fishermen's only chance of survival was rescue by a Sea King.

The severe head winds hampered progress and, despite two transit refuelling stops, by the time it reached the trawler, the aircraft was operating at the very limits of its range. The only possible winching area was the small and cluttered bow area, and the ship was rolling and pitching

violently in the massive swell. As the sun was setting, an attempt to lower the winchman was made but aborted as the ship was hit by a freak wave. The winchman was injured and winched back into the helicopter where, despite his injuries, he continued to assist the winch operator.

In all, the operation lasted some nine hours, although all the fishermen were finally recovered within 20 minutes. I hope that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to the crew of that Sea King, who performed such heroics while in peril of their lives, and provided us with a perfect illustration of why the forces of this country are held in such respect.

I shall deal briefly with personnel issues. Hon. Members will know that, over the past eight years, the number of people employed in the Royal Air Force has been reduced by almost 31,000. At the beginning of this month, the trained strength of the service was some 53,000. Although some reduction was warranted by the reduced direct threat to this country and its airspace, the RAF has continued to be committed to a wide range of operations. It reflects great credit on the personnel that those commitments have been met. There is still a manning shortfall—some 1,800 as at 1 April 1998—although that is expected to decrease in the coming year.

Recognising that the men and women of the Royal Air Force are its most precious asset, I can assure the House that the Government will ensure that the RAF can continue to recruit and retain the personnel whom it needs to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The retention of personnel in the RAF will become more difficult as the demand for pilots, particularly from the civil airlines, increases. That is a challenge to us. It does not make the position any easier, but the Government are prepared to confront the challenge. It is central to our consideration, and a key aspect of the strategic defence review.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is an important point. Is the Minister aware that, the longer the strategic defence review announcement is delayed, the more apprehension there is among RAF personnel? I urge the Minister, if necessary, to make representations to his Cabinet colleagues to make sure that that announcement is made as soon as possible—and certainly before the summer—so that apprehension can be alleviated and there is no danger to the future recruitment and training of those highly qualified personnel.

Dr. Reid: We are extremely keen that everyone in the RAF should be assured of the continuing validity and importance of the RAF in our defence plans. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point; I hear what he says, and he can be assured that we are doing all we can to ensure that we reach a coherent defence configuration in the shortest possible time. I assure him that, although the strategic defence review is continuing, it has not stopped us taking parallel and integral measures to develop methods of retaining pilots and aircrew. That involves giving them some form of security as regards their future.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Following on from my hon. Friend's question, can the Minister confirm that the strategic defence review has now left the Ministry of Defence, is being considered by the Public Expenditure Committee of the Cabinet this week, and will be considered by the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee of the Cabinet next week, so that, as long as it is not unpicked by the Chancellor, we can expect an early publication of the SDR—perhaps in the next two or three weeks?

Dr. Reid: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the strategic defence review—and the Air Force configuration—never leaves the Ministry of Defence. It has been overseen from the start by the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office in the first stage, and by the Ministry of Defence in the second stage.

The hon. Gentleman speculates about a meeting this week and next. I can inform him that those are not the first such meetings. Throughout the process there have been various meetings of a series of committees, inside and outside the Ministry of Defence, inside and outside Government. That will continue, and the hon. Gentleman can be assured that we will take the minimum amount of time necessary to achieve a coherent configuration and a relevant defence posture for the present circumstances. I am glad to give the hon. Gentleman the assurances that he sought.

We have made plain our view that, in all three services, we wish to recruit from the widest possible reservoir of talent and, following recruitment, we wish promotion to be based on merit. That policy will continue. As part of that on-going drive, the Royal Air Force is committed to increasing the number of recruits from ethnic minority backgrounds. Like its sister services, the RAF is an equal opportunities employer, within the limits of the law. The principles of equality of opportunity in employment, promotion and training—based on ability, performance, experience and aptitude—underpin all RAF personnel policies. Progression through the ranks is, and will continue to be, based solely on merit.

The House will no doubt recall that I announced in January that the recruiting target for ethnic minorities would increase year on year until it reaches 5 per cent. in 2001–02. As part of that initiative, the RAF is participating in discussions with a range of leaders, including religious leaders of non-Christian faiths, in an attempt to identify and then remove any potential cultural barriers to recruitment. In addition, the RAF is holding an equal opportunities open day at RAF Cosford on 15 June. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will attend the open day in order to underline the senior-level and political support for the Royal Air Force's decisions. He will be joined by Sir David Cousins, the Air Member for Personnel.

In view of some press reports this morning, I wish to make it plain that racial discrimination or harassment is not tolerated in the armed forces. There is no place for racism in the British armed forces, full stop. We have embarked on a major programme of equal opportunities awareness training. The RAF has further demonstrated its commitment as an equal opportunities employer, under the Race Relations Act 1976, by becoming a member of the race for opportunity.

In addition, the Chief of the Air Staff has personally signed up to the Commission for Racial Equality leadership challenge. The service will also be playing a full and active role in the partnership agreement recently signed by the MOD and the CRE. I remind the House that not only was the non- discrimination notice lifted that the CRE had hanging over the MOD's head, but we were singled out by Sir Herman Ouseley, the commission's chairman, as a leadership model in Britain.

[Dr. Reid]

In view of some of the rather lurid attacks in the tabloid press, hon Members will expect me to refer to women in the Royal Air Force. The House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering the issue of wider employment of women in the armed forces. Women have flown non-combat aircraft in the RAF since 1989, and combat aircraft since 1991. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea, who, as Minister of State, introduced progressive equal opportunities policies in 1991. The Government claim no monopoly in advancing the case of women in society. I am sorry that so many Conservative Members are embarrassed by such an accolade. I hope that I have not damaged the right hon. Gentleman's career.

I do not like to single out individuals, but I must mention the recent case of Flight Lieutenant Jo Ashfield—or Jo Salter, as she was known before her marriage. I deeply regret the ignorant and inaccurate way in which some sections of the media have chosen to report her decision to have a baby. Let me make it absolutely clear: Flight Lieutenant Ashfield is a fine Tornado pilot. She has completed two operational tours, and is currently serving—as RAF pilots do from time to time—on ground duties. She has balanced the needs of her service with those of her family life to perform well in the most demanding of roles that any individual—male or female—can be expected to perform. She has achieved this with the dedication and professionalism expected of all those who serve in Her Majesty's armed forces. We demand no less—and she has given no less.

We look forward to seeing Jo resume her career and return to the cockpit of a fighter aircraft when it is appropriate. I dare say that the cockpit of a fighter aircraft is a rather more demanding environment than the desk of the average media hack who has sat in judgment on that lady. In the meantime, I hope the House will join me in offering Jo and her husband congratulations on their happy news and in offering thanks for the way in which they have planned the birth so that she can return to duty in the service that she loves and in which we wish to see her serve.

I now come to the Reserve forces. The first Royal Auxiliary Air Force crews are now flying the Hercules out of RAF Lyneham. They were recruited from a pool of retired Hercules aircrew, and now provide a much-needed boost to our ability to support naval, army and air operations world wide. Four role support squadrons have already formed at RAF Benson, RAF Cottesmore, RAF Marham and RAF Brize Norton, and another will form at RAF Leeming later this year. Those squadrons augment regular RAF units when necessary. The developments are part of an approach to develop the skills and capabilities of Reserve force personnel as a vital element of the service's manpower mix. As I speak, members of the Reserve continue to support the regular RAF in operations in the Gulf area, Turkey, Italy and the former Yugoslavia. They play an important part in the RAF and will continue to do so.

I have taken considerable time describing the year's activities of the Royal Air Force because I think that it is appropriate to do so in the single-service debate. I have not concentrated on the strategic defence review in which my Department is currently engaged. I know that the House is tense with anticipation that I may have some news on that front. In order to relieve that tension, I must tell hon. Members that I will not be making any announcements this evening on the final outcome of our deliberations. However, I know that the House will want me to touch on the review and return to it later this evening if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I shall give a few basic facts. We said that the review would be foreign-policy-led, and it has been. We said that the service chiefs would be closely involved from the start, and they have been. We said that the review would be open and inclusive and would aim to build a consensus on defence into the 21st century, and it has. All those promises have been kept.

Mr. Blunt: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Reid: I would not complete my comments on the strategic defence review without giving the hon. Gentleman the chance to attack me, but I ask him to allow me to continue a little longer.

Of course, our task has not been made easy by some of the rumours and ill-founded speculation in the press—much of which, incidentally, has concerned the RAF. For example, I recall reading at an early stage of the process about the Government's desire to abolish the RAF. That then became a desire to merge the three services or to split the RAF between the other two services. Without going into any details of the review's conclusions or revealing any secrets about our final decisions, I assure the House that the SDR will not result in the abolition of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Blunt: I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way again. I refer him to the issue of openness. The SDR has been like a black hole: it has sucked everything in. However, Ministers have failed to expose any of the difficult issues and arguments with which we know you are having to grapple. You would have had the sympathy of everyone in the defence establishment and the academic defence establishment if you had exposed those ideas, but you did not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must remember that he is addressing the Chair.

Dr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Bayley: The second division of land command is currently based in my constituency and its future will be affected by the outcome of the review. I have had a very helpful and open relationship with Ministers—

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): And a negative one.

Mr. Bayley: It is not negative at all—far from it. Because Ministers have taken an interest in my comments, the Department is now considering a wider range of options, which I believe will benefit the review. Two dozen parliamentary questions have been answered. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister of State have met me on the issues. The process has been as open as it could be at this stage of the review.

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for his robust defence of the manner in which we have approached these matters.

My hon. Friend is not the only person who has been consulted. Discussions have taken place and people have been invited to seminars that have taken place in the House. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, has been involved in discussions. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the shadow Minister for the Armed Forces, and the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, have been involved. The Select Committee on Defence—the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who has already asked a question, is a member of it—has also been involved. The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) was in my office only 48 hours ago to discuss these matters with me.

I could refer to another dozen individuals who have been involved. The openness of the consultation exercise has been unparalleled, and it has not finished. Once decisions have been taken, they will be incorporated in a White Paper that will be put before the House. We shall then have further debates on the issues.

I am prepared to accept that everything is relative. However, in relative terms, I would challenge Conservative Members to find any exercise that has taken place over the past 50 years inside the Ministry of Defence that was conducted with the openness of intent an inclusiveness of membership that have characterised the strategic defence review.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Minister has referred to great openness. Can the hon. Gentleman now answer the two questions that I asked him last summer, which he has been unable to answer so far? Will he now publish the foreign policy base line, which is the most important element of the strategic defence review? Has he yet been able to come up with the mission statement for the Ministry of Defence which he promised last summer?

Dr. Reid: If we do not accept a premise, we shall not be able to reach a conclusion. I do not necessarily agree that the foreign policy base line, in the abstract, is the most important element. The force planning assumptions arising from the foreign policy base line are probably more important.

The foreign policy base line that the hon. Gentleman seeks to extract in some abstract fashion from the previous and sequential analysis has been outlined on any number of occasions in speeches and articles delivered and written by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

The hon. Gentleman, like an American advertising executive, seems obsessed with the mission statement. We have discussed aircraft carriers, strategic analysis, fast jets, intervention in Bosnia, humanitarian missions and global analyses, but the hon. Gentleman keeps coming back to the "major" issue of a mission statement.

Having reflected on the matter about 10 months ago—I nearly forgot to tell him this, but I shall update him—it seemed to me that it was probably more sensible to wait until we had completed the strategic defence review before incorporating other elements into it. I shall send the hon. Gentleman a personal invitation and probably give him an engraved copy of the mission statement when we finally produce it.

I return to the more substantial elements—while still trying to be as inclusive as I can.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): In the context of all the openness to which the Minister has referred, I hope that he may be able to agree to the meeting for which I asked at the end of 1997 to discuss the position of RAF Uxbridge, which he was then unable to grant me.

Dr. Reid: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we have refused a meeting with him? I see the hon. Gentleman nodding. To my knowledge, I have never refused a request from any Member to meet me. When the hon. Gentleman refers to the end of last year, I can only suggest that perhaps he made his request immediately before the death of my wife, and that somehow it was lost. The request was not brought to my attention. I shall discuss any matter with the hon. Gentleman. If he wishes to write again, we shall make some arrangement.

In the context of the strategic defence review, we fully recognise the unique and distinctive contribution made by all three services to our country's military capability. We will not sacrifice that, and the future of the RAF will be safe. That is not to say that there will be no changes. We did not embark on the SDR to maintain the status quo. It is clear that, in the new strategic setting, there is much greater scope for our armed forces to be able to operate together.

The House knows all too well that when we came to power we inherited shortfalls in key areas of capability. These are being shown up during the SDR. I hope that all of us will apply our minds to how we can best backfill the areas that have been hollowed out. They include strategic lift and logistic support.

We must be able to send our armed forces rapidly wherever in the world they are needed and, crucially, to support them there. This requirement is more demanding than during the cold war, where we expected the enemy to come to us. In future, we may need to transport our forces more quickly and over longer distances to emerging crises, whether in Europe or beyond. We must also work to resolve the inherited problems of overstretch and undermanning that put such a strain on service personnel and their families. These will be some of the key elements in the SDR.

Part of the inclusive process of listening will involve the next four hours. During that period I shall listen, as ever, to the comments that are made in the Chamber. If I am lucky enough to catch your eye towards the end of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall attempt to elaborate at greater length and in more detail on aspects arising from the SDR. I hope to say more at that stage about our defence equipment programme.

In the meantime, I hope that we can look forward to an interesting and lively debate on Royal Air Force matters this afternoon. Before we embark on that debate, I say to those men and women who play such a vital role in our services that they should not in any way mistake differences of opinion expressed from either side of the House on how we best approach the future of defence as representing divisions over the commitment to the Royal Air Force and over our support and appreciation of those people who serve in it. Whatever party we represent in this place, and on whatever side of the Chamber we sit, there is a full commitment to and a deep appreciation of the service that the men and women of the Royal Air Force give to the country.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Bank of England Act 1998

Royal Air Force

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

5.7 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I begin by associating myself with the Minister's opening remarks. He will be relieved to hear that I do not plan to speak for more than an hour. Many of my hon. Friends who sit behind me have a great deal to say and I know that they would not thank me for speaking for longer than an hour.

The Minister started by mentioning the agility, versatility and reach that are attributes of the Royal Air Force. However, as shown by my hon. Friends the Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), agility, versatility and reach are also hallmarks of the Conservative party when it comes to discussing aircraft types.

My speech will be largely complementary to what the Minister had to say and not repetitive. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will be pleased to hear that.

I, too, wish a happy birthday to the Royal Air Force in this very important year for it. I wish especially to include in these birthday greetings the former as well as the currently serving men and women of the Royal Air Force. They have a proud record in the battle of Britain, in the Berlin airlift, in the Falklands, in the Gulf and in Bosnia, where humanitarian supplies were delivered to Sarajevo in the great tradition of the RAF. Those missions and the RAF's work in the no-fly zones over Iraq are remarkable achievements, as is its continuing, quiet and unsung work in Northern Ireland, to which the Minister also referred.

I should like to link with those compliments the Ministry of Defence's civilian employees, the scientific civil service and the industrial civil service. The management structures with which they live change, the agencies change and the nature of the work changes, but usually the same people are on the ground—or in the air—as for example at Boscombe Down in my constituency.

I include in my remarks the wider Royal Air Force community; all the wives, husbands and children, the proud relatives and the proud local communities who live with the Royal Air Force. Wherever there is a Royal Air Force station in Britain—or elsewhere in the world—associated with it will be pride, loyalty, a special sense of community and, of course, additional economic prosperity, which spreads far beyond the perimeter fence. Civilians may not like the noise, as the Minister said, but they would surely miss the Royal Air Force if it went.

The Opposition warmly welcome the debate. It is always important that the House has an opportunity to be heard on our services. We were delighted and surprised that the Government's business managers chose this moment for the Royal Air Force debate. I suspect that the Ministry of Defence was also surprised, although perhaps not delighted, with the timing. The debate takes place in a vacuum. It is too late to have much influence on the strategic defence review and too early for Ministers to report the results of the review to the House. There is, however, a great deal to say about the Royal Air Force.

Can the Minister give any indication when we can expect the single-service debates on the Royal Navy and the Army? The Minister and I have been in the House long enough to know that there are occasions when, through the usual channels, business can be arranged to avoid Divisions on particular evenings. I suspect that this is one of those evenings, as I notice that the Labour party has a £500-a-ticket fund-raising thrash to which Labour Back Benchers have clearly flocked—I don't think. It is in everybody's interest to have some idea about the timing of the Royal Navy and Army debates and how they might relate to the strategic defence review announcement.

Can the Minister give us any more information about the progress of the strategic defence review, which is already very much delayed? We were told that it would be a six-month process; it is now getting on for a year. We all hope that the fruits of the labours of the three services and the Ministry of Defence will be agreed by Cabinet and, perhaps, exempted from the Treasury's comprehensive spending review, although I doubt it, as it is scheduled for completion in June.

It would be serious if the SDR slipped into the comprehensive spending review, and if publication was delayed beyond July. A six-month review that slips to 12 months would be damaging for the services and for the whole defence procurement industry. Damage has already been done to morale in the services and to defence procurement. We encourage Defence Ministers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) said, to fight their corner hard with the Cabinet and the Treasury, and we shall do everything we can to help them.

Looking ahead, and in the wake of the strategic defence review, will Ministers think about the future format of our defence debates? For two years running we have not debated the defence estimates. We deplore that. We expect a substantial debate on the outcome of the SDR, but in future years, and in view of the changing nature of joint operations between the services, should not the House have one tri-service debate on operations and personnel, one on defence expenditure and another on defence procurement? Those are areas that we could explore in future.

The Conservative Opposition follow the established and respected tradition of supporting our services whole-heartedly. We know that almost all our service men and women want defence to be above party politics. It is unthinkable that the Government of the day, of whichever party, would commit forces to action in theatre without the support of the Opposition. It is important that Opposition spokesmen and Opposition Members are briefed by the military and visit our forces on base, station, and ship and in theatre. That cements the commitment of Parliament to our forces and of our forces to the Crown. We are grateful to the Government for their continuing courtesy in enabling us to perform our role efficiently and effectively.

The Minister will know from his time in opposition—and will agree—that the Opposition must energetically pursue their proper role, and we shall. We shall listen to the forces, the academics, the procurement industry and our constituents. We shall probe, prod and cajole Ministers. We shall tell them things that they would rather not hear, and tell them things that those with whom they work would rather keep from them.

The Government know that we did not support their need for the SDR. There had been enough reviews and studies. We have promised the military a period of stability. When the SDR is eventually unveiled, we will want to know when we can expect the next review. Will the Government revert to a tradition of annual, rolling reviews linked to the public spending round, or will they follow the American or other traditions of quadrennial or quinquennial reviews?

Our response to the SDR will be positive. We will probably oppose some of the leaked proposals, such as leaks about the territorial services, because we believe that they are wrong, but we will consider the review carefully and thoroughly. No doubt we will hope to be able to support much of it, but our first reaction on the day of publication will be followed by a period of careful evaluation. It is true that there has been much opportunity for comment and consultation, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate said, it all went into something of a black hole. Apart from a couple of coded messages, we still know nothing about the secret foreign policy baselines on which the SDR has been based and it is empty to suggest otherwise, however much one scrutinises the speeches of the Secretary of State and others.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman mentioned a period of stability. Do his comments reflect a change in his party's policy? During the last six years it was in office, review after review—each described as a bitter pill to swallow, but a final one—did a tremendous amount not just to whittle down the size of the armed forces but to undermine their morale. Is he now saying that that was a mistake?

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman asked a long question, as he usually does, and my answer is short—no. What I said appears in the previous debate on the defence estimates, in 1996. It was the policy declared by Michael Portillo when Secretary of State—that there would now be a period of stability.

Mr. Blunt: Does my hon. Friend share the concerns that Field Marshal Vincent, one of the informal advisers to the Ministry of Defence on the strategic defence review, placed on the record in the Defence Committee—that there was no foreign policy base line to rely on, even for advisers inside the Department, other than the speeches made at the Royal United Services Institute and elsewhere by the Secretary of State, to help advise the Department?

Mr. Key: I have indeed heard that. I had hoped that some of those worries would be discounted today, but apparently not. It is serious when distinguished people feel that there is a fundamental flaw in the Government's strategic defence review. I certainly share my hon. Friend's concern about that.

Now for some probing and cajoling. I shall ask the Minister some questions arising from discussions with Royal Air Force families and their representatives. On Saturday, it is the Association of RAF Wives' annual conference. They would never say so, but I know that wives are disappointed that no Minister is able to attend. The RAF has been through a period of contraction and increased commitments, and the wives have borne their

[Mr. Key]

full share of the consequences. Were a Minister to attend—I am sure that there are good reasons why they will not—I dare say he would hear that there is much for which they are thankful, but some real concerns, too. When families are posted abroad, the wives or spouses usually have to leave their jobs, and do not pay national insurance in their own right for that period. When they return to the United Kingdom, they are disqualified from some of the benefits to which they would normally be entitled. I cannot believe that we cannot find a way around that in the social security review. I invite Defence Ministers to take that up with Ministers in the Department of Social Security to see whether we can assist those families. The aspirations of RAF families have changed during the years, and it is right that wives should seek work while their husbands are at work.

My second concern is pre-school education. In the United Kingdom there is a choice between pre-school playgroups and school for four-year-olds. Such a choice is a normal civilian aspiration, and parents make their choice in the belief that pre-school playgroups are more appropriate for some children than others, but sometimes when RAF families go abroad, notably to some parts of Germany, they have no such choice and have to send their children to schools where inappropriate pressure may be put on them. I should be grateful if the Minister would consider that.

Special educational needs pose another problem. I compliment the Ministry of Defence on the great progress that has been made. Parents are not forced to serve overseas if they have a child in need of special care, but often parents prefer to go overseas as part of their normal work. Sometimes, service schools abroad have special needs provision, but often they do not. In particular, special needs provision is apparently being cut in Cyprus. I should be grateful if the Minister would check that out, too.

Then there is the matter of the separation of husbands and wives when husbands are sent on detachment overseas. Some men are now sent three times or more to Bosnia or the Gulf. A year ago we were told that those separations were being monitored, and I and the Association of RAF Wives would be grateful if the results of that monitoring could be published.

The RAF wives have told me that they are impressed by the determination of the Defence housing executive and Annington Homes to provide a good service for them. Sometimes that service falls down on station, but complaints are referred by the Association of RAF Wives to the Defence housing executive and they are usually sorted. RAF wives are glad of that. I am glad to say that their worst fears have not been realised.

Finally, there is the vexed question of quarantine for pets, which has a huge effect on the families of RAF personnel. Literally thousands of forces families are caught by the system, which is cruel, expensive and unnecessary. There is a better way of doing that which will improve our safety against rabies. I know that the Government have set up a review and that quarantine will always be needed for pets brought in from some countries, but surely not from Cyprus, which is rabies-free, or from married quarters in Germany. The Government's review of quarantine is proceeding at a leisurely pace. Will the Minister ensure that the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, is aware that thousands of forces families hope for action soon?

The Minister has been strong in his support for cadets, and I pay tribute to him for that. The Air Cadet Council has meetings in the next few weeks to consider the serious financial constraints that are appearing over the horizon for it. The contraction of flying sites and the loss of gliding sites has also been serious. The further cadets have to travel, the more difficult and expensive flying experience becomes. Some air cadets are forced to give up, and others are deterred from joining.

The Minister knows that air cadets gain an invaluable inside knowledge of the RAF and the world of flying. They learn loyalty, dedication and discipline, and they reap the benefits of training at an early age. There are more than 40,000 RAF cadets, including members of the Air Training Corps and the air element of the Combined Cadet Force. Astonishingly, about 50 per cent. of the RAF officer entry and 26 per cent. of airmen entrants have been members of the cadets at some stage. That is truly remarkable. The Minister will agree about the importance of promoting the interests of the air cadets and ensuring that they have adequate resources.

I come now to the less agreeable subject of morale at the front line of the RAF. The Minister and I spend much time listening to what people think we ought to know. We also use our eyes and ears, but mine have been picking up some signals that he may have missed. As he said, no one should doubt for a moment the professionalism, skill and dedication of our pilots or of Opposition Members who raise controversial issues. People should not mistake or misunderstand what I am about to say.

Pilots have told me that they hear politicians praising them, as today, Government and Opposition Members alike, but they sometimes worry that we are insulated from the day-to-day realities of life in the RAF. What I am about to say is what they want the House to understand. There has been a lot of talk about the lack of a future, or an uncertain future, in the RAF. One immediately points to the Eurofighter project, instituted by the previous Government and pursued energetically by the present Government, but that seems a long way off for some, who tell me that they feel that we have reaped the peace dividend but minor conflicts now pose much more of a threat and we, the politicians, apparently do not see that or refuse to acknowledge the consequences.

At the height of the cold war in the 1980s, the RAF had some 33 front-line combat squadrons to counter the Soviet threat. Each one was utilised—cannibalised—to fight the conflict in the Gulf. The RAF now has about 19 combat squadrons, yet vastly more commitments, with Bosnia, the Falklands, the Gulf, Iraq, and so on, than at the height of the cold war. The simple fact is that the RAF is vastly overstretched. I know that the Minister knows that, but people feel that the RAF does not have the resources it needs and, as a result, people on the ground feel that they are not appreciated.

I am told that promotion prospects are not good. To get up the ladder now, it is perceived that one must not only be good at one's flying job but take on extra, secondary, duties to show commitment to the service. People who spend seven months of the year out of the country on exercises and operations feel stressed and offended by that.

Those who are leaving now are perceived to be the thin end of the wedge. As the Minister knows, the airlines are recruiting hard and the RAF seems unconcerned that its people are unhappy. I am told that simple things go by the wayside in the pursuit of greater efficiency. New flying suits for aircrew have been cancelled because of cost. That may seem trivial in the grand scheme of things, but such economy measures rankle.

People feel that the RAF is not the place that it used to be. It is difficult to explain, but it is what so many have said. Basically, they mean that much of the fun has gone out of the job. Aircrew stayed in the RAF because of the fun factor. The hard work and the bad times were worth it because of the rewards, but there are fewer rewards now. One pilot said that he was pursuing a thankless task. Of course he is wrong, but that is how he feels.

Most people with an option to leave are considering doing so. Even those who said that life was okay said that they would still leave as soon as their engagement was complete. Only one pilot out of about 20 expressed a determination to stay.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has spent more hours talking to RAF personnel than most people in the past few months, and his comments are entirely true, but does he agree that it is not only pilots, but senior NCOs—the people who are posted round the world and have far longer detachments than pilots, who support pilots day in, day out and who have had no promotion for the past three years—who, when they come to a break clause, are likely to leave the RAF as soon as they can? Much more serious, if they are approaching the end of their term of service, they will retire with a lesser pension because they have not been promoted.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. Some of the points that I have been making have been relayed to me by airmen as well as flying officers. I am sure that my hon. Friend will acknowledge that what he describes was happening under the Conservative Government, but we told Ministers that, if the SDR slipped, and if there was more uncertainty, the consequence would be a serious failure of morale. I fear that that is happening. Every week we delay on the SDR gives weight to what my hon. Friend has just said.

Mr. Bayley: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time.

I did the attachment with the RAF three years ago, and much the same sentiments were expressed to me by pilots and NCOs. Morale was low. We should hope that the strategic defence review will address those issues, which undermined morale in the armed forces three years ago, two years ago and in the past year and, sadly, were not addressed before.

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that those issues were not addressed before; the Bett report dealt with them. Those difficult problems have persisted for years, but I of course hope that they will be resolved.

Many people who do not have other options are accepting premature voluntary redundancy. They are leaving the RAF early and are losing gratuities and pension simply because they have had enough, which is bad news. People have talked to me about a huge shortage in middle management crews in about 12 to 18 months. The RAF now accepts that, and I am sure that Ministers are addressing the issue.

The Minister mentioned RAF Valley. I have been presented with a different picture and have heard that tactical flying instructors there are talking of huge problems. Some of the Hawk aircraft are on their last legs, we have heard stories of poor students coming into the system and it is said that about 90 per cent. of the instructors are studying for commercial licences. It is said that the training system is falling apart, although that is probably an exaggeration, and not enough new pilots are being produced. There is talk of a serious deficiency in front-line pilots in 12 months—there will possibly be 20 per cent. undermanning—and another person spoke of a shortage of 80 fast-jet pilots at the end of the year.

Before the Minister invites me to give way, I should say that I know that there was a problem under the Conservative Government, but it is getting worse. I draw it to Ministers' attention so that they can address it with vigour.

Dr. Reid: I was not going to say exactly that. I ask the hon. Gentleman, first, not to exaggerate the problems at RAF Valley.

Secondly, every nail that the hon. Gentleman hammers into the coffin of RAF Valley is hammered into the privatisation project with which the Conservative Government insisted on going ahead despite warnings from me and others that the problems that he claims are now occurring—I am not substantiating them—would happen. If he is correct, they are not a continuation, but the beginning of a problem arising out of the privatisation.

Mr. Key: I shall not pretend that all is rosy if it is not, but it is my duty to point problems out, which I do. I am not shy of pointing out where things have gone wrong, and I hope that the Minister will make a positive response to those difficulties. I am not seeking to drive nails into coffins, but I reiterate that my remarks reflect the genuine fears that have been expressed directly to me by pilots. We should discuss that matter seriously.

RAF Harrier force personnel are also said to be concerned about their continuing role on board ships because they spend an increasing time away from home. The problem of poaching by airlines, which the Minister rightly identified, will be added to if overstretch worsens.

Pilots are delighted about the Eurofighter. Although it will come into service in 2003, which is several years away, there are concerns that it will not be much more than a shell without much of its operational equipment working fully. I do not know the answer, but pilots are putting their concerns to me, and I hope that Ministers will take them seriously. It has also been suggested that there have been further delays to the in-service date or squadron deployment of the Eurofighter.

I have made those points with no pleasure. They are summed up by a pilot who is leaving the RAF early and losing a considerable sum of money in pension and gratuity rights. He said:

"I'm 33, I've got a wife who wants to work and a couple of kids I rarely see for months at a time . . . I work my fingers to the bone and yet no one seems to care until I screw something up under the pressure. I love the job but I just don't need the bullshit any more; British Airways will pay me more money for less work and treat me like a human being. Why should I stay in the RAF?"

[Mr. Key]

There are lots of reasons why he should stay in the RAF, as the Minister and I would agree, but I urge the Minister to consider carefully the poaching of RAF pilots by airlines. We cannot ignore it.

I must mention another issue, which the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) also wants to discuss, before I move on to happier territory: the crash of Chinook helicopter ZD 576 on the Mull of Kintyre, which remains unfinished business. My remarks are not party political—the Minister awaits my submission on the matter, which is on the way—but for the sake of the families of the pilots and of the others who died, and for the sake of those serving currently who continue to be troubled by the verdict of gross negligence against the pilots, I put it on the record that a small cross-party group of Members of Parliament continues to pursue what we believe to be justice for the pilots.

The Minister has promised us words of wisdom about procurement. In a previous defence debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) raised the issue of Slingsby Aviation and the Bulldog replacement scheme. The initial proposal to replace the Bulldog came from Slingsby three or four years ago when the Ministry of Defence had purchased its first Firefly aircraft for joint flight training, based then at Topcliffe in North Yorkshire. Slingsby was also competing to supply more than 100 Firefly aircraft to the United States air force. It won the contract in the face of fierce competition. It also won the Queen's award for export. Air forces in 12 other countries have the Firefly aircraft in service.

The Ministry of Defence, through Hunting Aviation as main contractor, acquired a further 25 aircraft a couple of years ago for the Joint Elementary Flying Training Squadron. We understand that the aircraft are well regarded and that the contract is being fulfilled without difficulty.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the matter. In terms of testimony to the Firefly, not only did the United States air force procure 100 of the aircraft, but as recently as two and a half weeks ago the head of America's flight training education command, General Newton, came to Kirkbymoorside and expressed his total confidence in the Firefly. He and many air forces throughout the world would find it extremely strange if this country did not use it to replace the Bulldog.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend's unremitting enthusiasm for Slingsby Aviation and the Firefly has been aired many times in the House. His constituents can be proud of his efforts and we shall no doubt return to the matter. I am not surprised that there has been such praise for the aircraft from the Americans.

Under current defence procurement arrangements, the Ministry of Defence has invited contractors to tender for the supply of an aircraft to replace the Bulldog on a number of hours flying time basis. Two contractors, Shorts and FRA Serco, have submitted bids. The FRA Serco preference is thought to be the Firefly, while Shorts prefers the Grob, which is a German aircraft.

The tendering process has gone on for well over two years. We are concerned that any cost advantage associated with the Shorts-Grob proposal results in part from a hidden subsidy, but we do not know whether that is the case. We know that the RAF has stipulated that, if the Firefly is chosen, it wants the more powerful Firefly 260, which is bigger and has more expensive running costs. That is no surprise, but it is a surprise that we hear that elements in the RAF are saying to Ministers, "Oh, but this aircraft has higher running costs, so we had better have another one." They asked for the aircraft and then said that they do not want the smaller versions. That is extraordinary, and Ministers must take a strong line because much is at stake.

The order is critical to maintaining an aircraft-building capability at Slingsby in Kirkbymoorside. Potential orders from Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Canada are on hold while they wait to hear whether the RAF endorses the Firefly, which we know it already has because it has been flying it for some time. It is inconceivable that, in military equipment of this type, the Government could prefer a German alternative to a British product that has been so overwhelmingly endorsed by our major NATO allies.

It is said that some of the top brass in the RAF do not like the Firefly and are making a lot of criticisms and excuses to undermine ministerial confidence, saying that its design is 30 years old, that the cockpit is too small, that visibility on landing is poor or whatever. That is fine. All I can say is that the Firefly meets the anthropometric specification that was laid down by the RAF in the first place, and if it did not like it earlier, it should have said so then, not now. I therefore urge Ministers to come to a rapid decision.

I should be grateful if the Minister could shed a little light on the proposed management of the forthcoming tranche II of the Hercules rolling replacement programme. Conservative Members are clear that an enhancement of lift, both airlift and sealift, is necessary to provide the mobility that is required for the joint rapid deployment force. There can be little argument that such an enhancement is needed, and sooner rather than later. Britain must be capable of deploying forces in support of United Nations-sponsored operations and humanitarian missions.

I am somewhat perplexed by the knots into which the Government seem to have tied themselves on the issue. Are we, for example, to participate with the French and Germans on the Antonov-70 aircraft, or are we to procure the Boeing McDonnell Douglas C-17s? Will the Government find the money—the £600 million—that is required as a deposit for development of the future large aircraft under the single phase commercial approach? If so, which defence programmes will the Government cancel to find it? I dare say that the Minister will say, "Wait for the defence review," but this is a sector where damage is being done to the British procurement industry.

Given all the uncertainties, how will the Government ensure that adequate levels of airlift, strategic and tactical, and sealift will be introduced into the inventory within a reasonable time frame? Will the Minister reassure the House that the pressing need for additional airlift will not become mired in European industrial rationalisation? That has been an eye opener.

On 9 December, the MOD and the Department of Trade and Industry issued a joint press notice, as the Minister will recall. It started by saying:

"The UK, France and Germany joined forces today to issue a challenge to their aerospace and defence electronics industries to restructure to compete in world markets."

They were given until the end of March. On 27 March, a joint press notice from the DTI and the MOD said:

"The government has received the response from the Airbus partners. The President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett and Defence Secretary George Robertson, who presented the 9 December statement on behalf of the UK, welcomed the joint report and the wide measure of agreement that has been reached between the partners."

On 20 April, we again read in an MOD press release:

"The Ministers welcomed the response from aerospace and defence electronics companies to the call last December by the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom to draw up restructuring plans. They encouraged industry to focus on the goals and means of restructuring, and to keep up momentum."

But, oh dear, on 1 April Mr. Kevin Smith of British Aerospace told the House of Commons Defence Committee, when asked why aerospace and defence companies were dragging their heels in industrial consolidation and submitting a response that was "short on detail", that it was

"to protect the competitiveness of not only aerospace, but all UK industry."

He said that the prime concern of a European consolidated company must be clear shareholder-driven values and he was "not sure" that the French Government were committed to such a goal. He said that we

"can't be definite on Airbus reconstruction"

because of concerns about the French Government's ideas on their ownership role.

Then, on 15 April, we read in *Jane's Defence Weekly* that Mr. John Weston, chief executive officer of British Aerospace, had said:

"The proposed European Aerospace and Defence Company, or Euroco, must be positioned as a wholly independent public company if it is to work in the global marketplace.

The French government's insistence on retaining a share in the merged company for the foreseeable future presents significant difficulties."

The article continued:

"Weston's stance came a week after the French government had insisted on state-ownership and the Spanish government demanded private ownership.

Weston said that BAe is completely opposed to the French notion of creeping consolidation, which will, he believes, destroy plans for Euroco."

I hope that Ministers will be extremely realistic about that. I understand the great difficulties therein, but it is a matter of grave concern to our procurement companies that this seems to be going wrong, so let us cut the buoyant press releases and do some sorting out in Europe—an area where the Government are supposed to be so well received.

I warmly welcome the Minister's announcement, made very quietly this afternoon, about the future arrangements for the in-house deep repair of aircraft. That was sensible and we certainly support it, but I am a little concerned about the implications for jobs, particularly at Almondbank, a remarkable establishment that I visited with members of the Defence Committee a couple of years ago. Will the announcement mean that that facility will remain at Almondbank, or does it imply a relocation?

We were a little disappointed, to say the least, by the Government's paper on the Defence Diversification Agency. There were no surprises about swords into ploughshares and there was little that was new. There was well-deserved recognition of the success of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and its partners, but all the difficult bits of the DDA were kicked into touch and left to the strategic defence review, so we are looking forward to what Ministers have to say about the tricky bits of the DDA and about DERA's future.

I recall a very early meeting at the start of all the business of contractorisation when the then Minister briefed me about contractorisation at Boscombe Down, which was where it all started. It has had it for a long time. It has been named and renamed—probably re-branded in current parlance—but DERA's future is crucial.

Industry is concerned that although excellent progress has been made on procurement and restructuring, there has been less movement on research and technology in general and on DERA's future in particular. It is concerned about the overall trend in defence research and technology, including dual-use activity and the way in which DERA operates.

The first point that industry is concerned about is that DERA must be responsible for maintaining an impartial source of expert advice to the MOD. That role is fundamental in implementing smart procurement, because the new procedures emerging from the MOD procurement executive and industry consultations depend on the MOD's being able to make informed judgments on technical issues.

In addition to supporting the MOD's intelligent customer capabilities, DERA's status as a Government organisation is crucial in maintaining access to material from other Governments, particularly the United States. Any dilution of that status through privatisation or other means would pose a direct threat to that function.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is my hon. Friend aware that it is because of DERA's status as a Government agency that foreign Governments are happy to place contracts with it? That earns foreign exchange and enables us to tap into technology that other Governments would not make available to us and would not show us if they felt that there was a risk of seepage, which in a Government agency will, I hope, not happen.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is spot on. I recognise his expertise as the Member of Parliament for Aldershot, which includes the DERA headquarters. Any dilution of that status poses a threat to that function. There must also remain a clear line of ministerial responsibility and accountability for fundamental security and procurement interests. I think, for example, of the work of the chemical and biological defence division at Porton Down.

Irrespective of the SDR's outcome, the market will not develop or maintain some capabilities that are essential to the UK's defence. That activity will surely remain one of DERA's core functions. It will also be linked to smart procurement because the applied research in that sector will reduce the risks and hence the costs of new programmes. The investment in DERA's technology base is a vital part of the ability of both the MOD and the defence industry to contribute to the UK's defence. Substitution for reduced spending in this area would be difficult for the private sector, and careful thought needs to be given to all the consequences of reduced funding.

The industry would like to encourage a joint effort with the Ministry of Defence and DERA to move matters forward, building on the consultative mechanisms created to design and implement the smart procurement initiative.

[Mr. Key]

I was glad to hear the Minister make such splendid comments about the Reservists, which I entirely endorse. It is crucial that we retain and promote the interests of Reservists in whatever force—the RAF, the Royal Navy or the Army.

I conclude on a theme around which we can surely all unite. People are the heart of our military capability. They are, and must remain, the highest priority. RAF personnel are expensive to train but we must never forget that people are the only asset that grows in value with the passage of time. Above all, creative, innovative and well-motivated people who are proud of their job and who are professionally and personally fulfilled are the foundation for the success of tomorrow's Royal Air Force.

5.51 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): I want to follow the comments of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). It is true that the days of RAF, Navy and Army debates, in the days of jointery, are now gone. We should look at doing things in a different way. I recognise what the hon. Member for Salisbury said about the forces being overstretched. In 1996, I spent a year on the armed forces scheme with the Royal Navy. It was clear, particularly on the frigates, that people were not getting home to their families in the way that they should. I was told that the same was true for the Air Force and the Army.

My father worked on Lancasters, Wellingtons and Hampdens in the second world war. I am a member of my local Royal Air Force Association club. I have a great deal of time for the RAF and if I did not, my dad would not have a lot of time for me. Anything I say now about the RAF is not being critical of its existence. I want to discuss where it is going in the future.

We must look at this historically. The Navy has been with us for about 800 years and we have had the Army for about 300 or 400 years, certainly from the time of Cromwell. The RAF is relatively new, lodged in a slot between the Army and the Navy. It was essentially set up after the first world war, in the days when we thought about air, land and sea—RAF, Army and Navy. In today's world, that is not necessarily how we should be thinking.

Twenty years ago, the Army was essentially the British Army of the Rhine in Germany and the troops in Northern Ireland, as ever. The Navy focused on the Iceland-Faroes gap and anti-submarine warfare. The RAF was concerned with home defence. All those things have changed. In many ways, 25 years ago the RAF was the pre-eminent force. It was home defence and the main nuclear deterrent force. That has gone.

There is no longer a cold war, so we have no real need for huge numbers of jet aircraft for home defence. We have no real need for the RAF in Germany, but we have increased needs for a projection of air power overseas. What we are seeing increasingly—I hope that the strategic defence review deals with this—is the birth of British power projection as carrier battle groups, with the capacity to put a brigade ashore and keep it going for as long as necessary, with all the air cover it requires.

I am not sure that the RAF will be able to do that with its current focus. We are in danger of the RAF being marginalised. The Army Air Corps is increasingly looking after the needs of troops on the ground. The carrier battle groups—essentially the Royal Navy air service—is looking after the fleet.

What should the RAF focus on? There is coastal command, air-sea rescue, the airborne warning and communication system, and things of that sort. Despite that, it is becoming increasingly marginalised. We need to consider whether it should be refocused. Nobody is saying that we should get rid of it, but it needs to be refocused for current conditions.

The RAF should be looking at bringing the strategic lift under our command, so that we are not dependent on the Americans as we are now. That is where we are lacking strategically. That should be one of the RAF's key roles for the future. I hope that the SDR will look at that.

We should be looking at two types of uniform on carriers. We should look at the joint strike aircraft on carriers, certainly ground attack, being operated to some extent by RAF crews rather than Royal Navy air crews. I know that there are problems with the different modes of command within the two organisations, and they would need to be brought together, but we should look at that for the future.

Other hon. Members may know this better than me, but I believe that we started talking about the Eurofighter about 10 years ago.

Mr. Key: It was 1984.

Mr. Cann: What is it for? I am not sure why we are building it, unless it is to import wings from Italy. I am not sure that we really require Eurofighter in the way we thought we did 14 years ago. To be a little bit critical—

Mr. Frank Cook: Will my hon. Friend countenance the argument that we need the Eurofighter in case we need the Eurofighter?

Mr. Cann: Yes, certainly. However, why we cut perfectly good Phantoms into pieces and sold them for scrap instead of mothballing them is beyond me. That is the way of the world. I am not sure that, essentially, we need Eurofighter. I am not sure what it is designed to fight in the wars we are envisaging.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I thought for a moment that the hon. Gentleman might be taking advice from my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark). If the hon. Gentleman does not understand the basic requirement for an air superiority fighter, he does not understand the need for the Royal Air Force.

One of the RAF's key purposes is to provide air superiority. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that other air forces have invested substantial amounts of money in developing fighter aircraft, and that the only way to compete with them is with something of the type and capability of Eurofighter? In its class, it is a first-class aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be allowed to answer one intervention before taking another.

Mr. Cann: All I am saying is that we are in danger of falling between two stools. We have the joint strike

aircraft, which is being developed with the Americans and we have Eurofighter, but we do not have the capacity to put many of those machines in the air in any case. We have gone adrift in our strategic thinking.

Mr. Alan Clark: I apologise for trying to encapsulate the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), and I do so with the greatest diffidence, because the expression that I am about to use is of monumental political incorrectness. However, I ask the indulgence of the House because I am quoting a remark made by the Lord Amery, the former right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion, who is, sadly, now deceased. I heard him say in this Chamber some 18 years ago that we live in an age "when wogs have MiGs".

Mr. Cann: I would not dream of commenting on that remark; perhaps it is appropriate to move on.

I know that manpower in the RAF has been significantly reduced. Some years ago, I heard that it took the Israeli air force one person to get an aircraft into the air, while it took our Air Force eight people, so the Israeli air force's ratio of person to punch was much greater. I understand that the situation has improved, but I am not at all sure that it has improved sufficiently, especially given that we use the RAF less than the other two services. I shall be interested to learn what the SDR has to say about that.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; I am sure that it improves our debates to have this sort of to-ing and fro-ing. I understand that Mr. David Hart has to some extent recanted the line that he developed and the hon. Gentleman was advancing. I think that it is somewhat out of date. The reason for Mr. Hart's recantation is that the Israeli air force does not have an international force projection requirement. It is simply the air defence force of the state of Israel. *[Interruption.]*.

Mr. Cann: Does the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) want to have a go while we're at it?

Mr. Menzies Campbell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cann: As I understand it, the Israeli air force is very efficient at what it does, and it can do it elsewhere, just as the RAF does when it moves around the world, so I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I was certainly not quoting someone called Hart, as I understand he belongs to a Conservative think tank.

The RAF has a wonderful history, and has done a great deal for this country. We need to consider seriously what it should be doing in the next 20 to 30 years, and I am not sure that, as a country, we have done that.

6.2 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The first half of the final sentence in the speech made by the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) is entirely correct: we have to reach some conclusion about what the Royal Air Force will do in the coming 20 to 30 years. The decisions made in the strategic defence review will almost certainly be those which shape its future, and even if the present Government were to be replaced at the next election or were radically to change their policy, those decisions will be so fundamental and far-reaching that they will probably not be able to be changed. In that sense, the hon. Gentleman is correct.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that he thought the timing of this debate was rather curious, because we were after the time of influence and before the time of decision. I suspect that that is exactly why this time has been chosen. We are in a vacuum, which explains why much of what he had to say was in the form of questions. Alas, much of what I have to say will be in the same form. I do not believe that my questions will be answered this evening, but I hope that they will be answered by the time the far-reaching conclusions of the defence review are made public.

I have some sympathy for the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), who has now left the Chamber, who thought that the Hercules aircraft had taken part in the Berlin airlift. He might have thought that because he has recently travelled in one, and those aircraft certainly have the appearance of having been around since the Berlin airlift. If ever there was a need for a replacement, it is for the Hercules.

However, I shall say more later about the C130J, which has not exactly been a paradigm of good procurement. Hon. Members who have flown as passengers in the Hercules will know that even the simple act of going to the loo involved some anxiety, because of the corrosion in that part of the aircraft.

I should properly begin with an apology, because, as a result of a prior commitment this evening, I will not be present for the winding-up speeches. I have apologised to the Minister and to the hon. Member for Salisbury. [HON. MEMBERS: "Are you going to the Labour fund-raising dinner, too?"] I cannot afford the price of a ticket. It appears that the Minister cannot, either; perhaps he is too much of a plain speaker for that no doubt rather gilded occasion.

The qualifications which I claim enable me to contribute to this debate are, first, that I am my party's spokesman; secondly, that, like the hon. Member for Ipswich, I am a member of the Select Committee on Defence; and thirdly, that I have the great advantage of having a very strong constituency interest, because RAF Leuchars is based in my constituency. That allows me to associate myself very strongly, if I may, with the Minister's observations about mountain rescue. The RAF Leuchars mountain rescue team, which is situated just on the edge of the Cairngorms, is frequently in operation and is a credit to the RAF, precisely as the Minister described.

As we have acknowledged today, the fundamental strategic defence review decisions are not known, so they cannot inform our debate. However, in addition to the seminars, to which some of us have had invitations, and the public sessions, one feature of the defence review that is rather different from that carried out sub rosa—if I can put it that way—by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) when he was at the Ministry of Defence, is that there has been a remarkable amount of speculation in the newspapers.

The Minister dismisses that as "mere" speculation, but I pause to observe that, if some of the information about the Territorial Army that has appeared in the past week is speculation, it is the most detailed speculation of all time.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

That gives rise to the view, with some justification, that there is a certain amount of inter-service briefing. I hope that the ultimate conclusions of the review are not unduly influenced by what looks on the face of it like competition for available resources.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. and learned Gentleman is making an interesting point. Does he agree that, the longer the SDR is delayed, the greater the chance that the bad news will be leaked deliberately? Any good news will not be leaked, so might not the services be jeopardised by the delay?

Mr. Campbell: I am with the Minister on that point. As I said, the decisions announced in July will shape the defence of the United Kingdom for the next 20 years, and will have consequences that are unlikely to be easily unravelled. On that basis, I tend to the view that the review should take as long as is necessary to get it right, and it should not be pushed.

I deal now with an issue that might in some circumstances be considered parochial, but which I think has considerable political significance. It concerns the role of the Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is important that, in the SDR, the level of senior service representation in Scotland is not changed. As we know, defence is not a responsibility that is to be devolved to the Parliament in Edinburgh.

It would be quite wrong to downgrade, by rank, status or responsibility, the office of the Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland, because the representational duties in Scotland, which are carried out by the RAF, the Royal Navy and the Army, are extremely important in presenting the public face of the services. They are important not just for themselves, but because, at a time of constitutional change—which I support, and for which I have been something of an advocate—they underline the fact that we are having home rule within the United Kingdom and within a parliamentary system which embraces Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and that responsibility for defence remains a UK responsibility.

"Sending the wrong signal" is a much-overworked cliché, but it can be used in a defence debate without too much criticism. It would be sending the wrong signal if there were any downgrading of the seniority of the senior representative officers of all three armed services.

I see that the Scottish National party Bench is empty. I have racked my memory, and perhaps the Minister could assist me. In the past 10 years, there have been perhaps 30 or 40 occasions in the House to discuss defence. I cannot remember a single occasion when the Scottish National party contributed by way of a speech. Indeed, I can hardly remember any questions being asked about defence from a party which says, "We must have independence so that we can have a Scottish navy, a Scottish air force and a Scottish army."

If Scottish National party Members have such enthusiasm for defence, one would think that they would occasionally participate in these discussions, which are bound to have consequences if they ever achieve their highly unlikely political objectives. The decisions taken here would have some effect on what they were able to do in Scotland in that regard.

Dr. Reid: I was challenged to rack my brains, and I have done so. The hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. I cannot remember any occasion when Scottish National party Members have been here to contribute to these debates. I would not mind that, except that the party—as the hon. and learned Gentleman knows—parades up and down Scotland, telling people that it is prepared to defend this regiment, that battalion or this company of the Territorial Army. In the hon. and learned Gentleman's area, the Scottish National party has no legitimacy whatever to do this when compared with his own record.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful for the Minister's felicitous reference to myself. One of the great claims for a Scottish defence identity—if one can call it that—is that we would be able to preserve regiments such as the Black Watch and the Royal Highland Fusiliers, and the Scottish National party would stand four square in their defence. The party's defence would be more effective if its members came here from time to time to contribute.

Everyone who has spoken in the debate so far—and those who will speak later—will acknowledge that the RAF has come through a period of rapid, and occasionally painful, change. Manpower has been almost halved in the past 10 years. It is no secret that morale has been fragile, and, on the basis of some of the anecdotal evidence of this afternoon, that fragility is still present to some extent.

From my experience, I believe that something of a recovery is under way. That is related to the quality of operational activity which the RAF has been required to undertake. For example, the air campaign before the deployment of NATO forces in Bosnia helped to restore morale. Although the length of the deployment on Invincible, in particular, caused some difficulty for families, nothing is better for the restoration of morale than asking the RAF to do a serious job.

There are some signs that morale has improved. It would be right if the uncertainty which a review necessarily involves could be eliminated, and some clear guidelines would assist in the process of recovery.

One thing seems to be absolutely essential. If the expeditionary strategy hinted at in the speculation—as the Minister would describe it—prevails, we shall require a well equipped and well motivated RAF in a strategic role, and not in the support role which has been suggested from time to time. The RAF may have given up its partial responsibility for carrying the nuclear deterrent, but its strategic significance remains as important today as it has ever been.

Mr. Keith Simpson: I do not know whether it was a slip of the tongue, but the hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the publication of the defence White Paper in July. Does he have inside information as a consequence

of the joint working committee between Labour and the Liberal Democrats that the rest of the House does not have?

Mr. Campbell: No—I only wish I did. I was proceeding upon the assumption, which I think is generally accepted—

Mr. Alan Clark: It will be published just before the summer recess.

Mr. Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman takes the words right out of my mouth. We will be packing our suitcases and getting out our buckets and spades to go off on holiday, and the White Paper will be published. That will have consequences not just for members of the Select Committee, but for Ministers.

That redoubtable figure—in more ways than one—the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), has made it clear that he intends to take evidence throughout the month of August, so that it will be possible to inform the House properly for the traditional two-day debate when we return in October. The Minister should not make too many grand plans for foreign travel—he may find that his constituency is as far as he gets in August.

There are a number of fundamental questions. Will the RAF escape what looks like a problem of securing long-term funding for its procurement programme? The Eurofighter is a £16 billion programme which is at a sensitive place in the long-term costings. Will the capability gap which looks as if it may open between the United States air force and the RAF have a consequence for the shape of the air power we are able to deploy?

One thing is certainly true. The cost of the next generation of aircraft—such as the joint strike fighter, to which reference has been made—is likely to be substantially greater than the cost of the immediately previous generation. As the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) said, we must ask how many aircraft the RAF will be able to purchase and operate. Is it inevitable, as some argue, that, with the reduction in the level of threat to the United Kingdom, the RAF will shrink even below its current strength?

Will it be possible to maintain sufficient front-line air crew, faced with the attractions of an undoubtedly expanding commercial airline industry, where the rates of pay and regular hours prove extremely attractive to pilots whose rates of pay may be rather better than they once were, but who—from the point of view of home life—find themselves substantially disadvantaged as a result of operational demands?

That leads me to some of the operational demands which have been discussed. SFOR is the strategic force in Bosnia—the stabilising force, in truth—which follows IFOR, the intervention force. Its mandate expires in June of this year, yet it is clear—as the allies have agreed—that some additional, or follow-on, force will be deployed. There may be implications for the RAF, because it is clear that the United States wishes to take a much lower profile in such a force. The Harriers have returned from Gioia Del Colle, as we have heard, but will a reduced US component in the follow-on force have consequences for the RAF?

We are still policing two air exclusion zones over northern and southern Iraq, seven years after entering into the commitment. How long can that commitment be sustained? What are the consequences for the RAF if it is to be sustained indefinitely? Most immediately, the deployment to the Gulf on Invincible and then Illustrious was succesful, but one must look below some of the headlines. If one talks to people with direct involvement, one finds that there were teething troubles, not least because two quite different cultures were aboard the aircraft carriers.

I understand that there was some reluctance among the RAF engineering support staff, who did not—to put it colloquially—join up to sit in a carrier in the Gulf. They joined up because they thought that they would be stationed on the ground; they did not expect that their lives would change as much as is inevitable on a ship.

There are interesting questions about whether, to avoid a clash of cultures in joint operations on an aircraft carrier, there needs to be joint engineering. To imagine that the differences between two services could ever be entirely eliminated is more than speculative—it is unlikely to be achieved.

The Minister mentioned search and rescue. Indeed, the RAF has made an enormous contribution to civilian rescue—90 per cent. of the missions, I think, are to save civilians. In the communities surrounding RAF Leuchars, we still very much regret, and to some extent resent, the fact that the flight of Wessex helicopters there has long since ceased.

The Minister must recognise that operational requirements such as I have described require fully recruited units. Perhaps he can—at some stage, if not this evening—give more information about those branches of the RAF that were short of personnel in April 1997, such as air traffic control, medicine, the RAF Regiment and telecommunications. An answer to a parliamentary question on 7 April this year made it clear that there were substantial shortages in front-line aircrew for some aircraft. How will those shortages be dealt with?

The hon. Member for Ipswich questioned the need for the Eurofighter. I believe that we need an agile fighter to replace the Tornado F3, which was designed to intercept Russian bombers over the North sea. The Eurofighter is designed to compete against the SU27 and its derivatives, which are available from the Russian manufacturers at prices that cannot be anything more than cost—they may be rather less—so that production lines are kept going.

The likelihood of RAF pilots—men, and women in the future—flying against an aircraft of that quality is high, as it is exported almost without consideration; so I firmly believe that Eurofighter will be an essential part of the RAF's armoury. Formal production contracts are due to be signed in June—when they are, those who have supported the project in the House and elsewhere will heave a collective sigh of relief.

There are two clouds on this otherwise air force blue horizon. First, as part of the unfounded speculation to which the Minister referred, it is rumoured that the number of orders for Eurofighters may be reduced—we shall have to wait and see whether that is in the White Paper. Secondly, it is suggested that, if there is a change of Government in Germany in September, the incoming SPD may want to reduce the numbers—I think that it is committed to 180. If that happens, there could be

[Mr. Campbell]

consequences for the work-share arrangements, which, as hon. Members will remember, were the source of considerable difficulties, requiring careful and sometimes brutal negotiation.

The first Eurofighter production aircraft is scheduled to fly in August 2001. The more significant question is when the Eurofighter will be in service—which means, in the RAF's definition, available and supportable in sufficient quantities to provide the desired effect. That is the critical date to which we should turn our attention.

There has been some discussion about whether we should purchase more than 232 Eurofighter aircraft to replace the Harrier GR7—there is even talk about a maritime version. The theory that we should have only Eurofighters and Tornado GR4s has some advantages, as that could produce economies. However, by confining ourselves to those two aircraft, would we have the range of capability sufficient for our purpose?

There is a further concern about the future offensive air system, which raises questions similar to those about the joint strike fighter. We should remember that the United States may buy 3,000 joint strike fighters, whereas the United Kingdom may buy 100. Such a contract would make us very dependent, so our commitment to the JSF has political, as well as military, implications.

Mention has been made of heavy lift. As I said, our experience of the C130J has hardly been attractive. We could opt for the C17, which has the advantage that it is already available, proven and in service. However, it is twice the predicted price of the future large aircraft. To go down that route would necessarily mean that we were abandoning a capability; it would also have industrial repercussions, even if the decision were taken for military reasons.

ASTOR—airborne stand-off radar—is another procurement issue. It is a £750 million project that would provide British forces with much enhanced intelligence gathering. As some will know, there are three possible bidders: Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and—a late entrant to the competition—Northrop Grumman.

Members of Parliament are often lobbied about such projects, and I am always slightly apprehensive about that. Without access to all the classified information, commercial in-confidence information and Ministry of Defence specialist advice connected with a bid, all of us who do not sit on the Treasury Front Bench are at a disadvantage. We should deceive ourselves and the House if we said that, on the basis of information in the public domain, we were qualified to make serious technical judgments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) has taken a particular interest in ASTOR and the Lockheed Martin bid—Lockheed is an important employer in his constituency. He is absent today, as he is on parliamentary business, but I undertook to convey his strong belief that the Lockheed bid should be preferred.

The hon. Member for Salisbury referred to the Chinook crash on the Mull of Kintyre. I do not want to reopen the arguments between the Minister and me that took place in a public forum when he gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence. I suspect that he has not changed his mind; indeed, I have not changed mine.

I simply do not believe that the available evidence—when viewed against the high standard of proof that the relevant RAF regulations require—justifies the conclusion that the pilots were negligent. As the hon. Member for Salisbury said, hon. Members from all parties, of which I am one—my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), who could not be here this evening, authorised me to mention his name in this context—genuinely feel that an injustice has been done.

Suggestions have flown around that those of us who have an interest in this matter and have reached the conclusion I mentioned are somehow challenging the integrity of those who found that there had been negligence. I can speak only for myself, but I say unequivocally that I do not for a moment doubt the integrity of those who were involved in what was undoubtedly an extremely difficult decision. I have a genuine intellectual disagreement with their decision, but I do not in any sense challenge their honesty, any more than they seek to challenge mine, or indeed that of the hon. Member for Salisbury.

Mr. Key: May I put on record my unequivocal agreement with what the hon. and learned Gentleman has just said?

Mr. Campbell: When we discuss procurement, industrial issues can never be far away. There was a joint report in the previous Parliament from the Select Committees on Defence and on Trade and Industry about the significance of Britain's industrial defence base when measured against procurement decisions.

The then Secretary of State, Mr. Michael Portillo, accepted the report's conclusions, and I would be surprised if the present Government did not take the attitude that, when important procurement decisions are being taken, regard must be had to the industrial consequences for our economy if manufacturers and suppliers other than those based in the United Kingdom are preferred. I hope for an assurance to that effect.

In that context, one cannot ignore the events of the past week or so. Westland has agreed to form a consortium with Agusta, creating the largest helicopter manufacturing enterprise in Europe, of a size and quality to rival those in the United States. Alongside the battlefield taxi decision that was taken yesterday, that is a sign of things to come.

Unless United Kingdom, and especially European, defence manufacturers integrate in the manner of those examples, the risk is that our companies will become mere subcontractors of United States defence companies. That would be bad for our industry, our defence and our political influence. I strongly believe that the integration of the European defence industry is the only way in which we can preserve in Europe a defence industrial base of sufficient quality and quantity.

There have been some political declarations on the subject—the hon. Member for Salisbury mentioned the one made in December 1997, and another was made on 20 April this year by the Defence Ministers of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain—but declarations are not enough: action is required.

As one who believes in the evolution of a European security and defence identity rather more strongly than some others in the Chamber, I believe that industrial

integration of the kind that is necessary for survival will have substantial consequences for common procurement, and that that in itself will drive the move towards far more defence integration on the continent of Europe.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Campbell: I have just about finished, and other hon. Members are waiting to speak. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Royal Air Force, like the other services, will await the strategic defence review White Paper with understandable anxiety—if not with quite the apprehension with which the citizens of Atlanta awaited the arrival of General Sherman—because of the uncertainty. I hope that, when we next discuss the Royal Air Force, many of the issues will be much clearer than they are today.

6.33 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I am delighted to follow the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), because it gives me the chance to thank him for a most informative speech.

I take this opportunity to speak up for the unsung heroes of RAF Stafford, which is the only supplies and distribution centre for the Royal Air Force in the whole of the United Kingdom since the closures a few years ago of Carlisle and Quedgeley. Consequently, billions of pounds of equipment is stored at or passes through the base every year. Mind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a word of advice for you or for any hon. Member who may rush to Stafford to seek out the RAF base: do not look for the runway; there is no runway, as the transport is all by helicopter or road.

I was one of the many right hon. and hon. Members who attended the presentation in the Palace by the RAF. I was impressed by the number who attended and by the quality of the presentation, which included a film showing all the many and varied talents of the RAF: fighter planes, vertical take-off and landing planes, helicopters and even cooks featured in the film. I did not notice any mention of RAF Stafford, and it is my great pleasure to make good that omission today.

The RAF handed us a booklet to take away, and I searched for references to RAF Stafford. The one such reference was to the mountain rescue service that the base provides. That vital life-saving service has rightly received tributes from hon. Members of all parties. Another word of advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker: when you come to Stafford, do not bring your skis; there are no mountains in Stafford, and the service is provided most commonly in north Wales.

The main business of RAF Stafford is the storage and distribution of supplies. It is a huge operation. I have been deeply impressed by the very size of the operation.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman is rightly proud of the RAF station in his constituency. Will he consider whether its functions might in due course be better carried out on a defence logistics basis? Perhaps, following "Front Line First", we should view RAF Stafford on that basis, as part of the drive towards the most efficient way of running the Ministry of Defence with the maximum co-ordination.

Mr. Kidney: If it helps the hon. Gentleman, I will deal later in my speech with the qualities of the personnel and with the co-operation between services in our armed forces. I ask him to be a little patient, and I will get to that point.

I recently visited the Argos distribution centre in my constituency. It is a brand new, modern private enterprise, and it is very impressive indeed. My compliment to the staff at RAF Stafford is to say that their operation is carried out as efficiently as that at Argos, with the difference that RAF Stafford's operation is much, much bigger.

The tactical support wing is based at Stafford. I am surprised that it has not been mentioned before in this debate, because it is a fantastic and vital service, ensuring that fuel and other supplies reach the front line before our services. An army may march on its stomach, but in the modern war zone armed forces do not get very far without rapid resupply of fuel for their aircraft, tanks and personnel carriers.

The tactical support wing is an illustration of co-operation between services. In the Gulf war, which is the last time that I can think of when the TSW's presence was vital, the armed services, both in the air and on the ground, had good reason to be grateful. At present, the TSW is permanently based in Northern Ireland, and it has a presence in Bosnia.

In addition to those vital services, there is the little known presence of several trade services at RAF Stafford, including engineering and carpentry. There is a modern engineering scientific laboratory service. All those services are capable of forming go-ahead, public-private partnerships. There is certainly willingness among the people based there to enter into such arrangements. Sometimes the obstacle is the rules that apply to the armed forces.

I can give a reasonably recent example of them getting in the way of modern arrangements. About two years ago, there was an opportunity for RAF Stafford and a private fleet vehicle hire company to make a private, commercial arrangement for the servicing of vehicles by RAF Stafford personnel. It was not allowed by the rules that were then applied by the MOD.

That example brings me to the people who work at RAF Stafford. Service personnel and civilians work alongside each other collaboratively. Industrial relations are first class. Everyone shares the same values of high quality, customer service and enterprise. It is no wonder that the organisation is so effective when the people who work there are so clearly valued by those who manage it.

Like everyone else, those stationed at RAF Stafford are anxious about the outcome of the strategic defence review. Its secure status as the only remaining supplies and distribution centre for the RAF may be an illusion. There has been much talk of tri-service working or jointery. Further modern developments in the services of the armed forces hold no fears for RAF personnel. If asked to service more sectors of the armed forces, they will deliver in style. The industrial relations, the modern organisation and the facilities on site all demonstrate that such services will be safe in their hands. Defence Ministers need only to ask, and they will respond magnificently.

6.41 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): We have had an informed and good-humoured debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) noted that this debate is

[Mr. Keith Simpson]

something of a stocking filler. It is held at the Government's convenience. It is an opportunity that Labour Members attending the social function elsewhere are sadly missing. I am sure that members of the Royal Air Force will take note.

Various matters have been raised and I wish to deal with two main ones. The first was mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury and commented on by the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann). The Government should consider changing the format of these debates. Ten years ago, Lord Younger of Leckie, when he was Secretary of State for Defence, put it to the Opposition, other parties and Government Back Benchers that we might consider doing away with the three single service debates and having two functional debates, one on the armed forces dealing with personnel and policy and the other on procurement and equipment. I endorsed that, but it was rejected because some hon. Members felt that the single service debates enabled them to raise single service constituency issues. However, we have moved beyond that. In this debate, many of the issues have cut across single service boundaries. I urge Ministers to consider the matter.

The second point is the question of what the Royal Air Force is for. The Minister of State talked about press speculation that we might be considering abolishing the Royal Air Force. All hon. Members present tonight would oppose that, with the concurrent conclusion that the RAF's current roles would be taken over by the Army and Royal Navy. The purpose of the RAF must ultimately be to achieve air supremacy in terms of its operational level and defence of the United Kingdom and to provide air support for the Royal Navy and the Army.

Hon. Members will probably agree that the idea that air power alone is a war winner or can always deter aggression is an over-simplification. I and many other hon. Members have concluded that we must get the balance between the Army, the RAF and the Navy correct in the strategic defence review. One problem in this debate is that we must bear in mind the balance of personnel, equipment and policy in relation to the Army and Royal Navy, which I hope that we will debate soon.

This debate is being held in a vacuum because, despite the Government's attempt to give the impression that they have been open and have consulted, the consultation has been based on the phrase, "We hear what you say." It is almost impossible to establish the baselines of the strategic defence review and so to discuss in an informed way crucial issues of RAF policy, organisation, personnel and equipment. I want briefly to consider some of those issues and ask Ministers some questions in the light of the strategic defence review.

I was fortunate to have an Adjournment debate on the strategic defence review a month ago. I again remind the House that the SDR has not started off from first principles as the Government claimed. Labour's priorities at the general election did not mention defence, so in any consideration of defence or, indeed, public expenditure, we must recognise that defence is not a major priority. We understand from everything that Ministers have hinted that the overall defence budget will remain at about £21 billion, at best. The defence review will not honestly examine our commitments and capabilities because if it did, it might conclude that we need to spend more on defence, but that has been ruled out. The SDR is determined by budgetary constraints, for the simple reason that the defence review is part of the comprehensive spending review.

The Minister of State was flippant about our not needing to worry about the foreign policy baseline, but that is the most crucial basis of the SDR. Why has it not been published? Time and again, hon. Members have asked for it to be revealed to them. This is not some academic debating point, but crucial to understanding the shape and size of the RAF and the equipment that it needs. We do not know what the commitments of the United Kingdom Government are. In the most friendly way, I issue a challenge to the Government in their reply to say what the foreign policy baseline is. If they do not, I assure them that the men and women of the RAF, who take a great interest in policy, will conclude that the baseline is highly flexible. If the Government's eventual decision on the SDR means that there is not sufficient money, the baseline will have to be moved.

The Minister was again flippant about my intervention about a Ministry of Defence mission statement. I am sure that the Foreign Secretary will be fascinated to know how flippant he was. After all, the Foreign Secretary insisted on issuing a mission statement for the Foreign Office within a fortnight of taking office. He made the point that any Government Department was effectively a large business and that it was the duty of the Government to come up with a mission statement. By heavens, if the Ministry of Defence is not a large business, I do not know what is. Surely, if the armed forces have to come up with mission statements—simple statements of aims and objectives—why cannot Ministers? I should be grateful to hear whether Ministers are any closer to coming out with a mission statement.

Like many hon. Members, a few weeks ago I attended in my constituency 80th anniversary celebrations of the formation of the RAF. Many hon. Members have commented on the contribution that the RAF has made, not only to the history of our country but to our independence. It is important to re-emphasise that we are dependent for our ultimate independence on the training, morale, equipment and motivation of our armed forces. I know that defence is not a priority to the Government or to our constituents. Many hon. Members are only too well aware that this is the first time for probably more than 100 years that our homes in the United Kingdom have not been under a direct threat. When people are not under a direct threat, it is easy for them to consider that defence is of marginal importance.

If we reduce the capability and strength of the RAF, it will be extremely difficult to rebuild it if we face a major crisis in the next decade. It is no good the Ministry of Defence working on the assumption that it would get a two-year warning. As an historian, I cannot think of an example in which the British Government have had a two-year warning or been able to act on one. The 1930s are a classic example of that.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I intervene with some trepidation as the hon. Gentleman is an historian, but there are two more contemporary instances that he might bear

in mind. The first is the Falklands and the second is the Gulf, neither of which appeared anywhere in the threat assessment.

Mr. Simpson: The hon. and learned Gentleman is correct. The Chief of the General Staff at the time of "Options for Change", on which a statement was made in the House in the last week of July 1989, said that printed at the front of the statement should be a comment that many of the conclusions about possible threats should be taken with a large pinch of salt.

The Minister and other hon. Members have pointed out that a crucial element in considering defence policy is joint service effort. That is difficult to consider in a single service debate, but we do not argue in the House that there should not be a single Royal Air Force. Nor do we argue that we should produce joint armed forces rather as the Canadians did some 20 years ago. They recognised that that failed in terms of operational effectiveness and the unique morale requirements of each of the services.

I should like to bring to the attention of Ministers the crucial link between the RAF and the UK aerospace industry. The industry provides world-class equipment, and in many respects the RAF is its showcase customer. I do not have to tell the House what that means in terms of jobs and British industry. The military side of UK aerospace is 50 to 55 per cent. of turnover, and air systems constitute £3.4 billion out of the £8.9 billion of the Ministry of Defence equipment budget. In anyone's terms, that is large-scale business.

Let me now consider the RAF in the context of the strategic defence review. The one big idea that is likely to come out of the SDR—it will be confirmed in June or July when the SDR is published—is the configuration of our armed forces for an expeditionary force capability. In other words, we shall go into serious force projection. Apart from the structural, equipment and personnel aspects tied up with the complex business of such a configuration, I am sure that all hon. Members recognise that it will be very expensive. Given the financial constraints under which the Minister is placed by the Government's determination to accept the previous Government's public expenditure proposals and by the comprehensive spending review, I am not convinced that he will find in the short or medium term the savings necessary to fund the full capabilities required for an expeditionary force capability.

Power projection obviously implies operating over long distances. There is a requirement for mobile air, land and sea platforms. There is the tremendous problem of sustainability. There is the requirement for sophisticated and robust weapons systems. One can add to that the requirement for joint and multinational capability. Those are phrases that easily flow off the tongue, but I know that the Minister realises, as do the armed forces, that they create major structural problems and problems of cost and priorities.

What is the wish list for Ministry of Defence planners and specifically the RAF for the operation of an expeditionary force capability? I shall take just some of them, because hon. Members have mentioned a number. They include Eurofighter and the BVRAAM—beyond visual range air-to-air missile. We have a requirement for a Tornado mid-life update. We have the possibility of a future offensive air system to replace the Tornado GR4. One of the most difficult decisions of all, which hon. Members have touched on, is airlift capability—whether we go for a future large aircraft or a C17.

I have not mentioned all the items on the wish list. I have not tried to put a price tag on each one, but we know only too well that Eurofighter alone will cost about £16 billion. I suspect that the package that I have talked about will cost about £30 billion to £40 billion. I genuinely recognise that the Minister has a problem if he is to fund that out of savings from a budget of £21 billion, even over the lifetime of a Parliament.

So what we shall look for when the SDR is published is not only the outline of an expeditionary force capability but the price tags attached to the weapons and equipment systems and the Government's priorities. The Minister is only too well aware that this is not an academic debate. As the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, we might face a crisis in two or three years—even one of a regional nature that would require us to send our expeditionary force capability without many of the key systems that the RAF argues are required. We are unable to discuss that in a wider strategic sense, because we do not know what the foreign policy baseline is.

All this has a major impact on personnel. If we go for an expeditionary force capability, it is likely that the men and women of our armed forces will have to spend more time abroad, away from their loved ones. It will put a greater strain on the social security support system within the armed forces. I fully support hon. Members on both sides of the House who have argued how important that is.

We all argue on behalf of our constituents. The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), who seems to have gone—*[Interruption.]* Oh, he is there. I beg his pardon. He is doughnutting a Whip. He is doughnutting two Whips.

The hon. Member for Stafford made a moving speech about a constituency interest, but the Minister is not in the business of buying off our constituency interests. Like other hon. Members, I have some RAF interests in my constituency or bordering it, and much of the informed, or uninformed, debate in the press causes great consternation. Such debate is not only a consequence of leaking by military personnel, because I suspect that there is a little informed leaking by the Secretary of State's special adviser. The footprints of a former defence correspondent of *The Financial Times* are all over the leaks.

Many of us will search the strategic defence review for a recognition that it is not a once-and-for-all review so that somehow or other defence policy will be put to bed. I suspect that it will be a rolling defence review and that we shall have to examine the small print. We shall also have to examine carefully the time scale for change and for the delivery of equipment. I fear that financial constraints on the defence budget will become worse in the Government's middle term and later, and that there will be major slippage.

Over the past decade, the Royal Air Force has performed magnificently at a time of enormous change, and has responded brilliantly to new operational requirements. I hope that, when the strategic defence review is eventually published, the RAF will see the way ahead in terms of its functions and equipment, and that it

[Mr. Simpson]

will not see the review as the product of new Labour but as an example of old-style Labour defence reviews à la Healey and Mason.

7 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I was pleased by the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) about the strategic defence review. They were a good deal more sensible and logical than his opening remarks, in which he suggested a Labour party pretence to cover delay. Labour has been calling for a comprehensive defence review for well over 10 years. Some of his colleagues will be able to tell him, if he cares to refer to them, that, when I was an Opposition defence spokesman, I called for that.

Mr. Gray *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I am intrigued that an inquiry can be made at such an early stage in my speech, but I gladly give way.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is talking about Labour's history on defence policy. He will know that, when defence was debated at the 1989 Labour party conference before the general election, the party voted unanimously, or by a large majority, to make huge defence cuts. I think that the amount was £5 billion. Since that time, there have been no defence debates at Labour conferences, because the leadership is afraid that that is precisely what the membership would vote for.

Mr. Cook: First, the hon. Gentleman is incorrect. Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman cares to examine history, he will see that conference decisions have not always determined the policy of the parliamentary Labour party. I am afraid that I have to rebuke the hon. Gentleman for trying to mislead the House on two counts.

Before I was interrupted, I was about to say that a comprehensive defence review would have been ideal at the time of "Options for Change". Anyone who read that with any alertness would have discovered that the only options were cuts. Cuts in defence spending under the previous Government far exceeded the cuts that the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk suggests would weaken defence.

Mr. Blunt: I should like to know the correct position on Labour's policy. Labour started to call for a defence review the moment it ceased to have a defence policy. It called for the ending of any strategic deterrent for the United Kingdom and continued to call for cuts in defence expenditure of £5 billion well after "Options for Change" was accepted. That is the post-cold-war reduction that the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his strenuous efforts to maintain his style of spin doctoring now that he is in the House. It is almost as good as the spin doctoring he engaged in before coming here. The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made a much worthier contribution. He gave his usual well-informed, measured and clearly analysed assessment. In the north-east of England and in parts of Scotland, there is a term with about 17 definitions, and it ideally suits the style of the hon. and learned Gentleman. Sadly, he is not in his place to hear my tribute. That term is "canny". The hon. and learned Gentleman always presents a canny case in a canny manner, and we all benefit from his expertise and insight.

I should have started with an apology for arriving late and for missing the beginning of the Minister's speech. I regret that I shall probably have to confine my style and cover a narrower range of issues than usual. That is because I am not as well informed as I used to be, as I no longer serve on the Select Committee on Defence. I should like to comment on three issues. The first deals specifically with the RAF; the second deals with the services in general; and the third will be a closing comment on the strategic defence review.

I express my sincere gratitude to the Minister for the patient way in which he dealt with my inquiries about the Bulldog replacement programme. That topic was aired at some length by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). As I have explained to the Minister, I have several reasons for raising the issue, and I have a particular interest in it, not least because I have flown the machine and been greatly excited by it. As the Minister knows, I am concerned, as he is, about British industry and its export prospects. My comments will largely echo those of the hon. Member for Salisbury.

The Firefly is a competent aircraft, whose rival is much smaller and less capable. It out-performs its German competitor in a range of important respects, and the RAF has been able to take account of that. However, one difficulty in trying to assess it has arisen from the criticism that has been drawn to my attention. I take the opportunity to counteract some of the criticism.

People have said that the Firefly cannot use grass landing strips. That is incorrect; it is ideally suited to land or take off on grass. It has a very wide track and a very rugged oleo-pneumatic landing gear, with excellent damping characteristics; and there are no fairing spats on the wheels, so there is no difficulty with grassland topography.

I have heard it said that the Firefly cannot be certificated to fly over water. That is incorrect. The Firefly was flown regularly in Hong Kong—and it is very difficult to land or take off in Hong Kong without flying over water. The criticism may originate from the possible need to carry a life raft in the luggage area. That is no problem, either. The criticism may refer to the problem with wearing a life jacket when flying. The original cockpit configuration was indeed somewhat restrictive, but, in consultation with the RAF, Slingsby Aviation has increased the width and height of the cockpit, and relocated the console.

I believe that it was said that the canopy was not large enough, and that the RAF anthropometric specification had not been met. Those criticisms have been addressed. Not only has the height of the canopy been increased, but, with RAF agreement, the position of the seat has been lowered. The taller RAF pilot, someone a bit taller than me, perhaps, at 6 ft 1 in—I am not 6 ft 1 in; I mean the potential RAF pilot—would no longer have difficulties of headroom, wearing his helmet, or of leg and knee room, because the console has been adjusted.

I must counter complaints about the canopy. Locking latches have been added to the sides of the canopy, which has not been blown off, but whose sides had been known to lift in some aerobatic manoeuvres. The additional latches have cured the problem.

The following changes have been made to the cockpit configuration. Internal width has been increased. Legroom around the knee to the outside has been increased. Legroom has increased to the reduced forward console. As I said, the canopy frame profile has been modified. Electric flaps have replaced the bulky hand-lever to the cockpit centre control. Wider seats and a cleaner—in design terms—centre console have been added. The engine controls have been modified to account for the RAF's preferred style of operation. The rudder trim has been electrified. The elevator trims have been electrified, eliminating the need for manual adjustment in original models. Finally, the cable-operated rudder pedal adjustment has been added, for simpler operation. All those changes are evidence of Slingsby's acute eagerness to meet the specification—which it has, in fact, exceeded.

As the Minister well knows, the original Firefly is already in service, on the joint elementary flying training programme. Cranwell has issued enthusiastic, supportive reports about its performance in the training programme. In Slingsby's discussions with the RAF, all the points that I have mentioned have been raised, discussed and understood, and Slingsby has managed to satisfy all the RAF's stated concerns.

It is important that we place on the record the fact that the RAF has expressed to Slingsby some of the Firefly's very real benefits. Notably, the RAF describes it as a strong, rugged, powerful machine, which, despite being powerful, can be throttled back within the required envelope. It says that the Firefly is flexible. It says that it has a military ethos—and I can testify to that, because it has the real, old-fashioned, military-style joystick, not the car-driving style of a conventional civil machine. The RAF says that the Firefly is good for teaching; that it has all the aerobatic capabilities required for manoeuvres; that it is suitable for training; and that it is capable of future development of requirements. So what is the problem?

The problem seems to be that Slingsby has been required to quote on the basis of one standard specification, whereas its German competitor, the Grob, is allowed to quote on a different one. In other words, we are trying to compare apples with pears, which I consider to be unfair. We are not starting with a level playing field—perhaps I should say that we are not starting with the same meteorological forecasts. One aircraft is being asked to fly in entirely different conditions. That is unfortunate.

If Slingsby were permitted to quote on the basis of its downgraded version, which has been in service much longer—the M200 rather than the M260—or on the basis of its T67M mark II, the price differentials would change immediately. The performance characteristics would be somewhat altered, but those two downgraded versions still match the Grob on performance.

Before I entered the House, I was a construction project manager—apart from a few other things, such as grave-digger, Butlins redcoat and barman. Immediately before I entered the House, it was my responsibility, on behalf of the company that engaged me, to negotiate further work. When there were four or five different corporations sharpening their pencils, it was sometimes necessary for the purchaser to have them all on hand, and to walk from one to the other. That was a good way of getting the best bargain, the best offer and the most reliable undertaking.

I know that the Minister has given the Firefly programme his careful attention and not yet taken a decision. Because so many questions about the programme continue to trouble me, I appeal to the Minister to ensure that the equation is fair, and that we strike toward the level playing field that I have been asking for.

The second area to which I draw attention relates to the strategic defence review, about which we have heard much tonight. We have also heard about reserves, but I did not hear a point that I wanted to raise; it may have been aired before I managed to get into the Chamber.

I need not remind the Minister that reserves are important. Just as the Eurofighter is needed in case we need it, reserve capacity and resource is needed in case we must call on it. We never know when it will be needed; indeed, the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife reminded the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk about the conflict in the Gulf, which, like the Falklands war, was unforeseen. We never know when we shall need the reserves—we need them in case we need them.

Quite apart from that, we need reservists to train cadets, and we need cadets to give us recruits to feed the services. Not only do cadets provide us with recruits for the regular Army, but, generally speaking, those who do not become members of the regular forces become much more socially responsible citizens, much better equipped to conform with society's requirements. They also become better servants of the people. Many hon. Members may have been cadets. Indeed, many years ago, in the string and canvas days, I was a member of the Air Training Corps. However, I was daft enough to sign on in the paras, so instead of getting into planes, I was jumping out of them.

I appeal for close attention to be given in the strategic defence review to the need for the reserves and the need to train them and equip them properly. People make comparisons between our reserves and those of our NATO allies, notably the United States of America. There is a difference of light years between the standards on one side of the Atlantic, even with Canada, and on this side of the water.

I am concerned not only about the inter-service rivalry, to which the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife referred, but about the regular-reserve rivalry. We do not have at the top a regular officer of sufficiently senior rank to be able the hold the corner and fight the case, as there is in the US. I appeal to my hon. Friend to consider appointing someone of more senior rank. I am not decrying the work that has done to date: I am saying that we need a voice that is heard in the MOD and within the hierarchy, and the more pips a person has on the shoulder, the more attention he usually gets.

Mr. Gray: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. He will have seen the speculation in the newspapers that, as part of the SDR, there is a proposal to cut the Territorial Army from 53,000

[Mr. Gray]

to 40,000 soldiers. It is too early to speculate what may be in the SDR, but if that is the case, will he join us in the No Lobby in voting against it?

Mr. Cook: I must answer the hon. Gentleman not by an evasion, but by what I always tell my Whip, who happens to be sitting not far away, with his feet on the Bench. I am pleased that he is present. My standard response to my regional Whip when he approaches me, which he does from time to time, is that I shall listen to the debate, weigh the arguments and cast my vote according to my judgment at that time. That is not always a welcome response. It has elicited one or two monosyllabic replies, but we are still speaking and we are still comrades, if my hon. Friend allows me to use that term with reference to him in our new climate.

I must answer the hon. Gentleman by saying that I am concerned about the matter. I try to be a man of my word. I shall weigh the arguments at the time, and he will see then.

Mr. Keith Simpson: On the hon. Gentleman's point about the requirement for the reserves to have a senior officer—

Mr. Cook: A more senior officer.

Mr. Simpson:—a more senior officer as their spokesman at the Ministry of Defence, I must declare an interest. The present director of reserve forces and cadets, Brigadier Richard Holmes, who is a Territorial Army officer, is one of my oldest friends and a former colleague. Given his wide experience and his knowledge of, and contacts among, senior officers, most people would argue that, whatever the outcome of the strategic defence review with regard to the reserves, as the first reserve officer he has probably played a more influential part than if he had been some three-star regular officer. I wanted to put that on record.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman. I in no way want to detract from the job that Brigadier Holmes has done. I have the utmost regard, respect and admiration for him, as I have for Brigadier Nick Hepburn, who plays a similar role in the north-east.

My argument is that, in the United States, there is a two-star general with overall responsibility for reserve concerns. If we had a two-star general with the extra brassware on his shoulder—more than a brigadier, although he could have a brigadier as his adviser—the fact that he had the higher rank would give his word heavier weight in any argument. That is a truism. If the hon. Gentleman disagrees with that assessment, we shall have to agree to differ.

Finally, I strongly associate myself with the words of the hon. Member for Salisbury and the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife with reference to the Chinook disaster on the Mull of Kintyre. My questions have never been satisfactorily answered. The inquiry was constrained by the remit that it was given at the time. The matter deserves a fresh airing. None of us can rest easy until then.

7.25 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): This is the first RAF debate in which I have participated since I have been in the House. I confess that my knowledge is not as detailed or of such long standing as that of other hon. Members, but I wish to participate in the debate because I have almost completed a year's secondment with the RAF under the parliamentary scheme.

I pay tribute to the Minister and to the RAF for the considerable resources that were placed at the disposal of the hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) and myself over a six-month period. We have seen a huge part of the RAF's operational capability. Everywhere we have been, we have been treated with the utmost courtesy. We have encountered a huge number of RAF personnel, from the most senior officers to the most junior non- commissioned service men. They have always been punctilious and have answered any questions that we might have. As a consequence, I have a reasonably good overall knowledge of how the RAF is functioning. I thank the Minister for that, and the RAF for putting those resources at our disposal.

The Government inherited a situation where RAF numbers had been reduced from about 90,000 to the current deployment of around 55,000. The Minister referred earlier to 53,000. When he winds up, perhaps he would clarify the number for me. Although the reduction has caused some operational difficulties, we still have one of the most flexible air forces in the world. That was demonstrated in the Gulf conflict. The only air force that the Americans would have anywhere near them in the front line was our air force, because of its discipline and training capabilities. That is a great tribute to our RAF.

While on secondment with the RAF, I encountered a number of apprehensions and problems. However, I do not want my remarks to be taken as a criticism of the RAF, which I regard as a superb and flexible organisation. I mentioned the shrinkage in manpower, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) dealt acutely in his excellent speech. As a result of the reduction in manpower, people at officer level and at senior NCO level have not received the promotion that they might otherwise have expected.

At certain RAF stations that I have visited, there is considerable dissatisfaction, particularly at senior NCO level. At one RAF station, I encountered a group of 20 very angry NCOs. When I put to them the standard question that I always ask when meeting such a group—"Would you recommend that your brother, son, daughter, nephew or niece should join the RAF?"—not a single hand was raised. I think that that is rather sad, and I hope that the Minister will look into the problem.

If those NCOs cannot receive promotion, perhaps they could attain some technical grade that ensures an enhancement of their pension, which they justly deserve. As I said, those people are automatically deployed with the RAF and, because they are not front-line pilots, their tours of operation are longer. Therefore, their overstretch is greater than that of pilots. I hope that the Minister will address that problem.

The RAF's personnel are its most important asset: they are irreplaceable. I have already alluded to difficulties with retention caused by the fact that people are not being promoted as they had expected. Recruitment in certain trades, particularly in the technical field—I am thinking,

for example, of armourers—will become a real problem. When service men near their release or review dates, they will simply leave the RAF. That is particularly true of service men in their mid-40s. They know that, if they take another seven-year term and remain in the RAF until they are in their 50s, they will be unemployable outside the service. They are precisely the people whom we must retain.

I am also troubled by the issue of recruitment to certain trades. I asked particularly to visit the head of the public relations department, Air Commodore McRobbie, who is an excellent man. I spent quite a long time with him, as I believe that public relations is extremely important not only for the RAF but for all three services. A huge amount of good news about excellent work done by the services both nationally and at individual station level is never reported in the media. I understand that it is difficult to get the media to print good-news stories—newspapers will print with alacrity one bad-news story that cancels out 20 good-news stories—but I think there is a structural problem with the MOD's public relations department that merits the Minister's personal attention.

Air Commodore McRobbie presides over the RAF public relations department. However, there are three separate public relations departments within the RAF for each command, and each has its own commanding officer—in other words, Air Commodore McRobbie does not have control over those three separate departments. Although he works closely with them and they enjoy an amicable relationship, that is not the same as having one senior RAF officer controlling all the public relations economics and personnel.

The public relations department should not be underfunded. It is important that youngsters—particularly those of school age—view the RAF as an attractive, modern and up-to-date organisation; it should be at the forefront of their minds. I have visited the schools in my constituency and I know that that is not so. Several improvements could be made to the RAF to change their attitudes.

Technical qualifications for service men vary throughout the RAF. In some stations in some areas, the situation is extremely good: service men automatically receive an NVQ or a GNVQ if they pass their course. In many cases, the most lowly NCO has a degree before he enters the RAF. However, that does not mean that a proper technical qualification, or perhaps an in-service degree qualification, should not be the norm. The RAF should also be an invest-in-people employer in every department. It should also be the norm that, wherever possible, squadrons and stations are registered ISO 9001. One expects up-to-date qualifications and verifications as a matter of course in an organisation with the RAF's capabilities.

During my time with the RAF, I noted several other matters that merit attention. The Minister mentioned the problem with contractorisation at RAF Valley. In many ways, the contractor agreement at RAF Valley anticipates what will happen with other large contracts elsewhere. RAF Valley is situated in north Wales in an area that is not well populated—there are certainly not many ex-RAF personnel in the vicinity. Many large contractors rely on employing ex-RAF personnel who, because they have severance and redundancy packages or pensions, may be paid relatively low rates.

When considering granting future contracts, will the Minister stipulate that the contractor must carry out a reasonable level of in-service training, particularly of new recruits? That would alleviate the problem that arises at the end of a contract when employees are not available, or, if they are available, are much more expensive, with the result that any potential savings are lost. That is a particularly important issue.

Another issue concerns the interface between contracts, the strategic defence review and value for money. RAF Sealand, for example, had to undergo a contractorisation exercise at the same time as a value-for-money exercise, together with the other reviews that the previous Government put in train. RAF Sealand now faces the strategic defence review. Some of those reviews were inevitable and necessary, but I wonder whether it was a good idea to conduct the contractorisation and value-for-money exercises at the same time. There is concern that, when the present contract comes up for review in five years' time, there will be a continual interface.

Several equipment issues have been raised in the debate. The RAF obviously needs to play a strategic role in any situation in which the British Government wish to deploy it—whether it be in conjunction with other forces on a multilateral or humanitarian basis or on a matter of United Kingdom air defence. I am slightly worried about the time scale of some large defence procurement contracts and the SDR. Although Eurofighter is specifically excluded from the SDR, it represents a huge cost. The potential contract for the United Kingdom is 232 aircraft, and I understand that the procurement will increase to 20 aircraft a year until 2014.

What will happen if a change of Government in Germany delays the signing of the contracts in June? I understand that the first Eurofighters are due to be delivered in 2002, and to be in operational deployment in 2004. If those dates are stretched a little further into the distant future, we might find that our existing Jaguar fleet, with its stand-off capability—if they are spared in the strategic defence review—and our Tornado fleet, with its mid-life update, are very old aircraft indeed. What would happen if we had to deploy in a modern conflict, such as might have arisen in the Gulf recently when Saddam Hussein refused to allow the inspection of weapons sites? I gather that the Americans were unwilling to allow any RAF assets to be used in the first strike. That suggests to me that we should look carefully at the timetable for the deployment of Eurofighter.

It is all very well having a modern airframe with a low radar footprint, but it is only as good as the defensive and offensive aids that are deployed at the aircraft. That brings me to missiles. In the past few weeks, there has been a shake-out of potential missile manufacturers in the United States. I am concerned that the next generation of missiles, the beyond visual range air-to-air missiles—let alone the advanced short range air-to-air missiles—could be delayed even beyond 2007. I understand that that is very much on the cards as the threat from the Russian R77 missiles is perceived to have lessened. However, in these days of increasingly available technology, one never knows from where the threat may come and when ballistic capabilities might be acquired and deployed. We should be making plans so that our aircraft are fitted with the latest missile capability.

There are a number of causes of unhappiness within Ministry of Defence procurement—so-called MOD PE—which is considered to be rather bureaucratic and

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

slow-moving. I ask the Minister to clarify the contract to supply the new generation of C130J Hercules, which are late in delivery. Although an element of compensation is built into the package with Lockheed for the procurement of those aircraft, why is it—this emerged in a hearing of the Public Accounts Committee on class I, II and III votes—that the contract does not provide for full compensation to be paid to the RAF? If there are design problems with the C130J—whether involving icing of the wings, or the propellers, or whatever—the RAF should not suffer financially.

It is true that we have considerably improved the way in which we operate procurement, but a great deal more could still be done. I know that the Government are looking towards smart procurement, but problems have arisen in the past over the large-scale procurement of a large asset. On occasion, all three armed forces have examined the latest example of bolt-on kit and decided, "We must have it." Consideration has not been given to any change in the main contract or what effect the "we must have it" approach would have in terms of delay, delivery and overall costs. No doubt costs are scrutinised carefully when we enter the initial contract, but we do not always scrutinise costs as the contract is proceeding.

It seems to me that there should be clearly defined review dates. There should not be a drip, drip approach to large contracts. A proper review date would enable MOD PE, after one year, two years or whatever period is specified in the initial contract, to say, "This may be desirable, but what will be the revised procurement cost, and for how long will the project be delayed?" Our approach to the procurement of larger assets should be much more disciplined.

I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate, so I shall be relatively brief in my summing up. As I have said, there is considerable apprehension at all levels of personnel in the RAF about the delay with the strategic defence review. I understand that that is imperative—and I understand also that the SDR must be agreed by the Cabinet—but I hope that the SDR will not become enmeshed in the new expenditure review, which would delay it even further.

I hope that, when the SDR is produced, it will be comprehensive; that it will focus on the proper foreign policy baseline; and that it will give the RAF complete operational capacity to defend the United Kingdom and take part in unilateral or multilateral operations throughout the world while participating in every humanitarian role that the Government of the day may possibly wish it to. The longer the SDR is delayed, the more apprehension there will be; the more personnel will decide, on reaching their review date, not to stay with the RAF; and the more difficulty the Minister will have with recruitment subsequently.

When the result of the SDR is known, I hope that all senior officers in the RAF will take every opportunity to visit every squadron at every base to explain carefully all its implications. At various different stations, the men have said to me, often in front of their station commander, "Yes, we are able to make the points that we wish to make to our station commander but we often do not know whether they go further than him." On those occasions, the station commander naturally gave an explanation.

The Chief of the Air Staff emphasised to the hon. Member for Lincoln and me yesterday that he had had a fair hearing throughout the SDR process. If all men in the RAF could hear the Chief of the Air Staff and other senior officers saying that, they would be considerably more satisfied.

The RAF is a superb and flexible organisation. It is the second best and most flexible—if not the best and most flexible—air force in the world. After 18 years hard work under the previous Conservative Government, the United Kingdom is the second largest defence equipment exporter in the world. I hope that when the SDR is produced, and when all its implications are fully understood, those two positions will be maintained.

7.44 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) to his position on the Opposition Front Bench. His expertise on this subject over a great many years is well known. It is refreshing that that has at last been recognised by his friends on the Opposition Front Bench this evening.

When I was seeking inspiration for my brief speech this evening, I decided to look back to the last time that the House debated the Royal Air Force, which was on 6 February 1997, when my hon. Friend made a detailed and distinguished speech that lasted 35 minutes. He covered the spectrum of life in the Royal Air Force. His speech filled me with trepidation when considering the modesty of my own interest in the RAF.

I feel some trepidation also in being called immediately after my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who is a parliamentary neighbour. He and I shared, until relatively recently, the distinguished RAF base at Kemble. My hon. Friend has the great advantage of being on the RAF side of the armed forces parliamentary scheme—a scheme I am just about to complete. That is gladly from my point of view but sadly in terms of the debate, because I have been on the Army side of the scheme. That being so, I claim none of my hon. Friend's expertise.

I had intended to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who unfortunately is no longer in his place. I presumed, rather ungenerously, that he would not vote against the Government if he disagreed with them on the subject of the Territorial Army. On reflection, it occurred to me that he courageously rebelled against the Government on handguns when a debate on that subject took place in the House some time ago. I am therefore confident that he will have the courage of his convictions if the Territorial Army is cut as deeply as the newspapers would have us believe it is about to be.

None the less, the hon. Gentleman accused me across the Chamber of misleading the House on the Labour party's history on defence cuts. I forbore from intervening at the time to object to that accusation, but despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman is no longer in the Chamber—perhaps he will read my remarks in *Hansard* tomorrow—it might be worth placing on the record precisely what Labour party conferences over the past few years have said on defence.

Since 1995, any move to debate defence spending at the Labour party conference has been banned in favour of a motion calling only for a defence review. Before that,

for six consecutive years there were motions calling for a cut in defence spending to the western European average—a cut of £5 billion. All those motions were passed. As recently as October 1990, at least five members of the Cabinet defied the Labour leadership by voting for that policy on the National Executive Committee.

In 1993, a Labour party conference resolution to cut defence spending was passed with a necessary majority. In 1995, the leadership avoided the debate altogether. It was then faced in the House with a rebel motion, which was supported by 42 Labour Back-Bench Members.

The suggestion that the Labour party has always been in the forefront of defending defence is absurd, and the notion that the strategic defence review is foreign-policy-led and may not result in substantial cuts in the defence budget is extraordinary. Labour's track record is there for all to see. I find it distasteful that the hon. Member for Stockton, North accused me of misleading the House.

Experts on news management will use the SDR in years to come, perhaps when someone is engaged in a PhD on it, as an example of a classic case of news management. There has been a series of leaks in Sunday newspapers along with briefing, counter-briefing, rumours and counter-rumours, on what the outcome of the SDR will be. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) correctly said that a great deal of that material will be coming from the special adviser. My hon. Friend should know; he was a special adviser in the Ministry of Defence during the previous Administration, as were other of my hon. Friends.

The strategy is well known. Someone has a word with a journalist from *The Sunday Times* and says to him, "You know, some people are suggesting that the RAF should be disbanded altogether, giving up fixed wing aircraft to the Royal Navy and helicopters to the Army, or vice versa, but I'm not sure whether you should carry that on Sunday." On Sunday, *The Sunday Times* carries it, and on Monday the Ministry of Defence assesses the reaction. If there is utter opposition and people throw up their hands in horror, the Minister says, "I have no idea where that journalist got that extraordinary story from. Don't worry about it." If the reaction is positive, however, the Ministry will crack ahead with the policy. That is classic news management, and the SDR is a classic example of it.

Another advantage of news management is expectation management. By putting about a story in *The Sunday Times* that we may be about to disband the RAF, the Minister can turn round when the SDR comes out and say, "Don't worry, those are absurd stories." Indeed, he did that rather convincingly this evening. He can say, "Those stories that we might consider disbanding the RAF were, of course, nonsense. I can reassure the House that all we are going to do is cut it in half, and that's not nearly as bad as the story that that idiot in *The Sunday Times* carried some months ago."

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I hope that my hon. Friend can reassure me that he is not related to Mr. Bernard Grey, who seems to be responsible for many of these things.

Mr. Gray: Heaven forfend. I have the distinction of having an "a" in my surname, and therefore am a Scot. I suspect that Mr. Grey has an "e" in his name and therefore, I regret to say, is an Englishman. Perhaps I should not say that, as I represent an English constituency. I must be careful about these matters—and it is St. George's day. I regret that I am not wearing a rose, but I admire the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) who is. I wish that I were.

The news management, briefing, leaking and counter-briefing that has been going on in the context of the SDR has been made worse because of the inter-service rivalry in and around the Ministry of Defence—Army against Navy, RAF against Army, and so on. The Minister says that that cannot be the case, but I have a letter from a serving General in the Army, whose name will remain confidential. He is a friend of mine. He has written on Ministry of Defence writing paper. In his letter, he says:

> "I . . . do not hold to the view . . . that the RAF should be disbanded and that their aircraft should be flown by the Army and RN. What I advocate most strongly is that they are outrageously overmanned for what they do and deliver. Some of what they do now could be sensibly privatised . . . I consider that the RAF must be forced to identify their core business".

He goes on for two or three pages, telling me, a humble Back Bencher, how he believes the RAF must be slashed to pieces. There is no PS, but the hidden PS is, "But, of course, my particular branch of the Army must be saved."

It is entirely unhealthy that one service should be against the other. It is particularly unhealthy when the Regular Army is against the Territorial Army, or vice versa. I very much hope that the strategic defence review will not give in to such rivalry, but that it will instead do precisely what the Minister has always claimed—use a foreign policy baseline to produce a sensible combination of the three services.

It is extraordinary that the foreign policy baseline, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk referred so convincingly, has not been published. That inevitably leads Opposition Members to presume that there is no such thing. I am particularly puzzled that, when announcing the strategic defence review, the Minister went to great lengths to make it clear that Eurofighter and Trident were exempt. We all welcome that and would not for a second suggest that they should be reviewed, but if the review has a foreign policy baseline, how can one start by excluding the two most expensive items in our defence budget? There can be no foreign policy baseline if one excludes consideration of those two things. The reason they are being excluded is surely the employment consequences of doing away with them. In other words, the review is economics-led—Treasury-led—not necessarily foreign-policy-led.

None the less, I am encouraged by what the Secretary of State said when we last debated this subject: he gave an absolute commitment that there would be no cuts as a result of the strategic defence review. I think that he said at the time that he would put his job on the line on that basis. If there are deep cuts when the SDR is announced, as we on the Opposition Benches suspect, I am certain that all Ministers currently serving in the Ministry of Defence will have to consider their positions carefully.

I have a particularly strong constituency interest in this subject. North Wiltshire is firmly a defence-related constituency, and the RAF in particular has always played an extraordinarily important part in it. Until recently, my constituency had RAF Lyneham, RAF Kemble, RAF Rudloe Manor, RAF Colerne and RAF Hullavington. I regret to say that we do not have all those bases now,

[Mr. Gray]

which we all deeply regret. Some of them have converted to Army use. RAF Lyneham, RAF Rudloe Manor and RAF Colerne are the only three that remain with the RAF.

In that context, I divert from the RAF to a more interesting constituency area—the disposal of the former RAF bases, which I hope you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will consider in order, as it is closely allied to looking after the RAF families who live in the area and to other RAF issues, even if it is not directly related to the issue of the RAF as currently structured. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to answer these points when he winds up.

The first point is about RN Copenacre. Hon. Members may be surprised that North Wiltshire, which I suspect is the most inland constituency in Britain, has a Royal Navy base. It is probably the most inland RN base anywhere. It has been wound up, and we have a large vacant site. The Minister is considering where the Defence Vetting Agency should be based. I believe that the three options available are Woolwich, Southampton and RN Copenacre. I very much hope that he will consider moving the agency to Copenacre.

Until recently, Corsham's economy was 39 per cent. dependent on defence. I think that that is the largest dependency of any town in England. It is extraordinarily high. The closure of Copenacre, Rudloe Manor, Spring Quarry and others has caused significant difficulties for the town. Many people in Corsham commute to Bath, Bristol and Chippenham to work now that there is no RAF employment in the town. We are in the process of applying for Government funding to re-establish Corsham station, which existed until recently. The county council owns the land. I hope that the Minister will speak to the Minister of Transport and that he will add his voice to ours, suggesting that the station has something to be said for it, or that we may be successful in applying for Konver II funds from the European Union to make up the economic deficit as a result of the closure of RAF bases.

I ask the Minister and his colleagues to hasten the sale of three sites in my constituency, all of which are still owned by the RAF but which could be better used in other ways—RAF Kemble, RAF Rudloe Manor and RAF Spring Quarry. The Minister might be interested to hear that the RAF Kemble Heritage Association, which is a limited company and represents businesses currently based on the site, has come to an agreement with the four local authorities involved—two in Gloucestershire and two in Wiltshire. They are putting together a joint proposal on purchasing the RAF Kemble site for use by the existing businesses on it and to keep it open as an airfield. Many businesses are dependent on the airfield.

Perhaps the Minister will give the proposal careful consideration, particularly if a property speculator comes along with an outrageously high bid for the site. The RAF Kemble Heritage Association is, I understand, prepared to pay £500,000 more than the commercial valuation for the site. It is prepared to pay a reasonable market price for it. Perhaps property speculators will come along in the hope of building housing on the site and will pay a ridiculously large amount. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to deviate slightly from the subject to make that important point to the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I did not realise that my hon. Friend intended to raise the subject of RAF Kemble, which is half in Gloucestershire and half in Wiltshire. I intervene only to reinforce what he says by asking the Minister please to hasten the decision on the sale. Commercial contracts relating to the leasing of the buildings are at stake, and it would be helpful if it could be put on the market as soon as possible. I believe that the planning brief has been virtually finalised, so there is no reason why it should not be put on the market.

Mr. Gray: I apologise to my hon. Friend. I should have mentioned to him that I intended to raise the matter of RAF Kemble. I think that it is two thirds in Wiltshire and one third in Gloucestershire, but we shall not argue about that. My hon. Friend spoke at some length earlier about the C130Js based at RAF Lyneham and he did not tell me about that, so perhaps it is fair do's all round.

The remaining existing and strong RAF interest in my constituency is largely based in and around RAF Lyneham, which has 3,000 personnel. If one throws in their wives and others who stay with them, that is a substantial part of my electorate.

Mr. Frank Cook: Wives thrown in.

Mr. Gray: We, being trendy new Conservatives, are happy to accept that people other than wives may be staying with them. I believe that "partners" is the currently acceptable new Labour expression. They account for a large number of the voters in my constituency.

The well-being of RAF Lyneham is extremely high on the agenda of issues with which I am much concerned. RAF Lyneham does not seem to be threatened in any shape or form by the strategic defence review, but we are, none the less, disappointed that a beautiful new training building has been erected for the new C130J Hercules, with training already taking place in the mock-ups getting ready for the arrival of the aeroplane, but that so far the aeroplane is delayed by about one year. I understand that it may now be ready by November or December. I hope that it will be, but I cannot help but feel that RAF Lyneham is all dressed up with nowhere to go. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold, I wonder why Lockheed is not being pressed more fully for full compensation for the late delivery of the aeroplane.

Also based at RAF Lyneham is the very good RAF auxiliary squadron of air dispatchers. They are nearly all retired RAF people. I think that I am right in saying that it is the only air dispatch squadron in the Territorial Army. We also have the air mobile squadron, which has the famous claim to be first in and last out in any conflict because the Hercules must be there with the stores.

I want to raise several issues concerning families and the way in which people live in and around RAF Lyneham. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) rightly said that defence debates such as this are about not only guns and aeroplanes but the way in which the RAF and service personnel live with their families.

The first issue that I am particularly keen to raise concerns schools. The school in Lyneham, and particularly secondary schools in north Wiltshire, have raised with me the fact that the standard spending assessment is based on the number of children in a school, a figure which can be calculated only once a year—I think on 19 March, or around that time.

I have raised the matter with the Department for Education and Employment, but it tells me that, if it were to change the basis of the calculation for service schools such as those in my constituency, it would have to do the same for other schools. If service personnel are posted and, as a result, the number of children in a school goes up or down, the Government should be ready to increase, or on occasion to decrease, the amount of money given to the county for its schools.

I appeal to the Government to change the method of calculating SSA so that the number of service children in secondary schools in north Wiltshire might be calculated, say, once a quarter, so that the SSA more accurately reflects the number of children in the schools.

I do not want to be distasteful, but another issue that I am keen to raise relates to sewerage in and around RAF Lyneham. Because of the de-icing of the runway at RAF Lyneham during many years, the sewers, which have not been renewed since the 19th century, regularly clog up. The water and sewerage provision in the area—on the base and in the village—is unacceptable.

The issue was raised with the MOD, I understand, as long ago as 1972, and the MOD gave the absolute assurance that the work would start in 1997 and be completed in 1998. I regret to say that, despite that assurance, sewerage in the village of Lyneham is still in something of a mess.

Labour Members point this way. They may be right; the failure to renew the sewers in Lyneham may be the result of a slippage on the part of the previous Conservative Government. *[Interruption.]* There will be a slippage if the sewers keep bursting. Had I spoken on the subject as a Government Back-Bencher, I would have been as harsh on my Minister as I am being on the present Minister. Will the Government please sort out the sewerage in Lyneham with all due dispatch?

The RAF has been the lifeblood of my constituency now for many generations, and it still is to a significant degree in the form of RAF Lyneham and the many retired RAF personnel who live in the area. The RAF is an extraordinarily important part of life in North Wiltshire. Therefore, as we approach the strategic defence review, I join my hon. Friends in appealing to the Minister not to forget the RAF, the RAF families who surround the bases and the RAF retired personnel who have given such distinguished service over the years.

8.6 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am delighted to participate in the debate—a prospect which I particularly relish given the presence of the Minister for the Armed Forces, who is such an engaging character, who really enjoys his job. He is certainly a round peg in a round hole. He enjoys it so much that I understand that he may even seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to speak again.

However, the Minister may have found his match in my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who I am delighted will respond on behalf of the Opposition. I join my hon. Friends in paying tribute to him, because he is one of the great experts in the House, and has been for many years, on matters to do with aviation, not just the RAF.

I also pay tribute to the Minister for the way in which he is trying to approach the review. He mentioned earlier a meeting which took place 48 hours ago. It is important that people outside the House should understand that, although parties may differ on detailed issues of policy, nevertheless hon. Members speak to each other. Occasionally, we even enjoy a glass of wine together. I may say to the Minister that the Chardonnay could have been slightly cooler, but no doubt he will have a word with his private secretary about that. Despite our differences, we do have the opportunity to engage in constructive debate.

In view of the important contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), this has been a wide-ranging debate, moving from sewerage at Lyneham through to the wider issue of the joint strike fighter going on into the 21st century.

I am delighted to participate in the debate because I have such a great attachment to the RAF. I venture to suggest that I even owe my existence to the RAF, because my parents met when serving with the RAF in the far east during the war. They knew each other for only five weeks before they were married, so but for the RAF I would not be here. I have a greater interest than even the Minister in the well-being of the RAF, and everyone who has its interests at heart will be delighted by his assurance that it is safe as a separate service.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said when he outlined the Opposition's position, we are debating the RAF in a vacuum, because the strategic defence review has not been completed yet, and we have nothing firm to go on. Understandably, the Minister cannot give details today, so we rely to an extent on rumour, speculation or even hunch. We do not know the provenance of stories floated in the press, and do not know how accurate they may be.

Dr. Reid: Nor do I.

Mr. Howarth: We do not know how accurate such stories are, but there may be truth in them. It is the job of the Opposition to press the point and to ensure that they are not considered to be simply the wild imaginings of journalists; indeed, they may be kites flown by Ministers to test public opinion.

The Minister hopes that the review will be published ere long. He and the Secretary of State have made it clear that it is driven by foreign policy considerations, and that it will not be resource or Treasury-driven. As Conservative Defence Ministers discovered, the Treasury is a powerful institution; many people argue that it is too powerful. The Treasury has an important role to play, but I hope that the Minister will ensure that it does not get its way, and does not use the review as a cost-cutting exercise, because that would destroy the reputation and credibility of the Minister and of the Secretary of State.

The Minister and the Secretary of State have made great play of the fact that the review is based on foreign policy considerations and on creating the right shape of forces with which to meet the foreign policy baseline. If it turns out to be a cost-cutting exercise, their credibility will be shot to pieces and there will be great anger. I hope that it will not come to that, and I do not think it will, because I take comfort from the fact that the Government, like their Conservative predecessors, believe in exerting British influence throughout the world, and acknowledge that the armed forces have an important role in underpinning and reinforcing British foreign policy.

[Mr. Howarth]

The British people take great pride not only in the quality of the services, as has been acknowledged by hon. Members from both sides of the House, but in the fact that our services professionally, skilfully and effectively carry out the tasks that the Government call on them to undertake in support of British foreign policy around the world, whether they be humanitarian or, as in the Gulf war, offensive.

The Prime Minister has been in office for a year, and has great aspirations to walk on water and to flex his muscles internationally. The Prime Minister could see his ambitions and aspirations on the international stage thwarted if the Treasury comes down too hard on Defence Ministers' proposals. He would not tolerate that, and I hope that the Treasury would be given its marching orders.

Hon. Members have mentioned morale in the RAF and in the services generally, which is an extremely important issue. The review represents the third reconfiguration of our armed forces in less than 10 years. My hon. Friends with more direct experience of the RAF than I have, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), have mentioned many examples of the dissatisfaction—I shall not use the word "despair"—that is felt around the services.

The RAF has received much of the flak during reviews and studies. Overstretch is common to all three services, but the numbers relating to the RAF speak for themselves. In 1990, the RAF had 90,000 personnel. The general mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire will be pleased that the number will be reduced to 52,500 by next April—a 40 per cent. cut in manpower, which must have an impact on operational effectiveness.

In 1996, the Defence Committee concluded that the RAF was only just about meeting its commitments. Since then, additional calls have been made on the RAF to act on behalf of the Government in a wide range of roles—the Minister mentioned the extensive commitments in which the RAF has been engaged since he became responsible for it—despite continuing decline in numbers. Morale has unquestionably suffered.

I pay tribute to someone who has not been mentioned in the debate, but who deserves considerable credit for the extraordinary dignity and courtesy that he showed while commanding the RAF during the past five years. Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon had great political pressures placed on him when he was in command, and he had to watch his service take fantastic reductions in manpower and in equipment. Sir Michael has now retired, after doing a great job in difficult circumstances.

The result of the review for the RAF and for the other services must be the creation of a stable climate in which there are real career prospects for those who join the services, especially the RAF. They must think that is a service worth joining for the long term, not simply to put in the hours on a long-haul transport aircraft necessary to get a better paid job with British Airways with infinitely reduced commitments and more time to spend with their families. The Minister must address that matter.

Ministers have said that they believe in the continuation of the three separate services. Subject to more jointery, I hope that that will happen. Jointery is not new. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) was at the Ministry of Defence when it was first pushed up its scale of priorities, and the previous Administration carried out rationalisation, although there is clearly scope for more.

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) was not enthusiastic about Eurofighter, and questioned the need for it. I shall deal with that issue in a moment, but we must understand why we need a separate RAF and what its role is. I can do no better than quote from a recent article by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Knight, chairman of the Air League and chairman of Cobham plc, and a very great man indeed. He wrote:

"Whether it be in the provision of vital intelligence information; transporting key combat troops and equipment rapidly over great distances; broad area surveillance of enemy movement; the ability to disrupt enemy machinery for command and control; gaining local or, if necessary, theatre air supremacy, thereby allowing land and maritime forces to move with relative impunity; threatening or, if required, executing ever more precise attacks on the enemy's key installations and weapons systems. In these and many other situations of combat and near-combat, the air provides the key to joint-service success."

That encapsulates what the RAF is about. It has a range of roles. It does not have one simple role, but that is summed up in one expression: air superiority. Without that in the Gulf, we would have had a much more dramatic loss of life, which would not have been sustainable against public opinion at home. Therefore, air superiority is vital, but to provide it is not cheap, as Ministers are finding out.

This should not be seen as a debate between investment in people and investment in equipment. Of course the people are important—everyone has paid tribute to the skills of those who serve, particularly those in the RAF who fly combat aircraft. I have never flown one myself, but it is a very skilled operation. Pilots have to be able not just to fly, but to manage a sophisticated weapons system as well. We need first-class supplies both of equipment and personnel, so we cannot stint on training. In this review, I shall look carefully at the implications for RAF training.

In the 1980s, during the time of the previous Government, there were severe restrictions on flying hours. It is no good having highly professional pilots who have not had the flying hours to maintain their capability on the aircraft. Not only that, but I do not believe that Members of Parliament or Ministers would be able to have clear consciences if they knew that they were providing highly professional and skilled people, who are devoted to their country and committed to their service, with second-rate kit. We have to give them the best equipment available. Preferably, it will be British, and generally those two coincide.

I am concerned at the proposal to mothball some kit. I hope that, when he sums up for the Opposition, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood will deal with the question about the Jaguars. If Eurofighter is not going to come into operation until later, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold suggested, we have a serious gap. The Jaguar has a role to play, and I do not believe that it should be mothballed.

It is no good mothballing kit if no pilots with current flying experience with the aircraft are available when we need it, and if there are no qualified engineers with up-to-date training to service it. Otherwise, those aircraft will go into theatre without proper servicing back-up. That needs to be dealt with.

In the new world order, Governments expect to call on the services at a moment's notice, so they must not deny them the training. That was what was behind my question to the Minister, when I asked what "high-intensity readiness" meant. I hope that the services are getting a lot of training, so that they can feel confident about going straight into battle.

On training, I am bound, as a former university air squadron pilot, to say that I hope that university air squadrons will be safe in the review. They have an important part to play. They are a great source of air-minded young men and women with the opportunity to fly, and a source of material for the RAF.

It is important that we understand that we provide the equipment for our services to ensure that they have the best available to carry out the tasks we impose on them. It is not for the benefit of industry, but there is, of course, an industrial dimension to this; it would be foolish to ignore that, particularly as British Aerospace happens to be one of Britain's great success stories.

It is appropriate to pay tribute to Sir Dick Evans, who has been just been appointed, with effect from next month, chairman of British Aerospace, and John Weston, who will become, I think, chief executive, for their contribution over a long period to the industry. I do not think that anyone with the interests of the RAF at heart will deny that it has done well in terms of equipment. Some exciting new equipment has been delivered, and some is yet to come.

Going through some of the programmes, as I tried to say to the hon. Member for Ipswich, it is extremely important that we have Eurofighter. It is also important that we cease this endless debate about something in which we have invested a huge amount of money, time and skill. It not only provides us with an air superiority fighter, which is what we need—it is a superb aircraft in that role—but enables us to continue to develop a huge range of technologies, in many of which Britain leads the world.

Eurofighter exists not as a job-creation scheme, but to provide a first-class bit of kit. However, it also gives British industry the opportunity to remain at the leading edge of technology, so that, when it comes to the joint strike fighter, British industry will be able to play its part and perhaps get the chance to take part in production of an aircraft for the United States air force.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend consider another aspect of Eurofighter? It is not only the present predicted procurement by the four partner nations that is important. Because it has nearly the same capability as the F-22, but at a considerably lower price, Eurofighter has a large potential export market. Therefore, it is important that the four basic partners get on and commit themselves to the numbers at the present time.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is right. Essentially, only three or four aircraft will be in this category. They include the F-22, which, as he says, will be hugely expensive, and the Eurofighter, which will be almost as technologically advanced—it does not have stealth capability—but at a much lower price. As I worked for the Sukhoi Design Bureau for a year, I can tell hon. Members that the SU-27 is out there as well, and is also very effective. To say that Eurofighter has enormous export potential is perhaps exaggerating, but I think that it has export potential.

It will help if the Government commit to the beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile. I am sorry to go on again about it, and I shall not say any more than that, but I ask the Minister to take himself back to the debate about whether we should go down the American route of the high-speed anti-radiation missile, or develop our own.

I was one of those in favour of developing our own system ALARM, the air-launched anti-radiation missile, because the Americans would not allow us access to the head technology of the high-speed anti-radiation missile, HARM. If the Americans want to do business with us, it is essential that they let us have access to the technology, or there is no deal on the table. The opportunity of giving British and European industry the chance through the Meteor programme of producing a world-class missile should not be lost. I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

The recent exercise in the Gulf has shown the importance of carriers as platforms. I agree with John Keegan that it would be welcome if the Government produced some serious aircraft carriers. As he said:

"What is needed is a short take-off supersonic aircraft, equally acceptable to the Navy and the RAF."

I have always believed in supersonic VSTOL—vertical short take-off and landing aircraft. More development funds should be put towards that.

Other colleagues have mentioned the future large Antonov. I get fed up being told how anti-European we are in the UK. British Aerospace has been working flat out on the future large aircraft, and what are the Germans doing? They are running off talking to the Ukrainians about the Antonov-AN70. We are the good Europeans, not only on this, but on many other issues—and I say that as a proclaimed Euro-sceptic.

Mr. Keith Simpson: No.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend did not seem to be aware of that. I will have a word with him in the Tea Room later. I have obviously not made my policy clear.

We must have some decisions. The Hercules will not be around indefinitely. I entirely support the C130J, and, although there are problems, I believe that they will be resolved. The Government must start making some decisions on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury mentioned the problems with Slingsby. The Minister should be concerned that there seems to have been some moving of the goalposts. I have flown the Firefly, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood. It is a very good aircraft. Having made the improvements to it, Slingsby has removed any obstacle to enabling Ministers to select that aircraft. I hope that the MOD will not be guilty of the crime of moving the goalposts and disqualifying Slingsby for putting in a bid that was compatible with the original request for a proposal.

I have written to the Secretary of State—he has kindly replied to me today—about the future of Dowty. I am concerned at the prospect that Britain might be about to lose ownership of one of its successful supply companies. At present, Dowty is half owned by Snecma of France and half by the TI group in the United Kingdom.

I have not had the assurance that I sought from the Secretary of State. If the state-owned French company is to acquire Dowty Aerospace, which has 40 per cent.

[Mr. Howarth]

of the world market in landing gear for civil and military aircraft, the Government must tell us what security of supply there will be for landing gear for Eurofighter and other aircraft if the French chose at some point to close factories in the United Kingdom and transfer manufacturing to France.

As we have heard tonight, the Royal Air Force is a great service that has done us all proud. It has done us proud in a way that relates to my constituency.

For many years, man has sought to break the sound barrier on land. It has been done in the air many times, but it has only just been achieved on land. It was achieved by Andy Green, a Tornado pilot. It was a fantastic achievement. I do not think that people fully understand the risks involved. The driver had a huge influence in that record being broken. He went through the sound barrier with the steering column at 90 deg, such was the drift of the Thrust SSC vehicle. It was his qualities as a Tornado pilot that enabled him to do that.

I conclude by paying tribute to the Royal Air Force for the support it gave to Andy Green and to Sarah Millington, who was at base control. It gave them some time off—not very much, I hasten to assure the Minister—and that sums up the Royal Air Force, the quality of its personnel and what it can achieve.

8.33 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): It is extraordinary that, in the 80th anniversary year of the Royal Air Force, people are still talking about whether it will continue as an institution. The Minister felt the need to make that explicit in his opening speech. Any serious examination of the RAF's contribution makes it clear that there is no question of anyone being unwise enough to do without it, in the same way as no one could conceive, politically, of getting rid of 80 per cent. of the Territorial Army's combat elements. It is on that scale of political foolishness.

As other hon. Members have said, when such questions are raised, it resonates with serving and retired members of the RAF that, occasionally, the questions are taken seriously enough to be repeated in the newspapers. There has been a culture of insecurity about the Royal Air Force that has produced one or two unwelcome effects as it has sought to compete against the other two more senior and established services. Indeed, in his opening remarks, the Minister described the RAF as the junior service. I know that he did not mean it like that, but such comments are unwelcome, and reinforce the feeling of insecurity.

It has meant that, within the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Air Force has taken extremely successful political action to secure its position. It groomed future chiefs of the air staff from an early age to fight the political battle for the RAF inside Whitehall. In my experience in the Ministry of Defence, that has meant that the central control over ideas and the development of tactical doctrine was strong in the RAF and very centralised. People coming up with different and challenging ideas were not welcome. That is a pity, and it is unnecessary.

The strategic defence review is supposed to be a wonderful open process, and I hope that, following in the steps of "Front Line First", which invited ideas from the armed forces for improving the support area of the services and which, in a sense, let a thousand flowers bloom, ideas will be welcome from service men, particularly those in the Royal Air Force. I hope that it will not feel the need to entrench its position and be defensive.

I can give an example. The ownership of support helicopters has, for a long time, been seen as something to be defended by the RAF, not in desperation but in determination not to give up any part of that empire; yet, for decades there has been an extremely strong case for examining how we organise our support helicopters which fly, most of the time, in support of the Army. Has there really been a case for constantly maintaining strict ownership of support helicopters within the Royal Air Force?

Such has been the mentality within the Ministry of Defence that I am told that, some years ago, there was almost a formal agreement between the Chief of the Air Staff and the Chief of the General Staff that, if the Chief of the General Staff stopped trying to get hold of the support helicopters, the Chief of the Air Staff would stop trying to get hold of the new attack helicopters. We are beginning to get away from that mentality. I hope that, in this 80th anniversary year, the RAF will feel that there is no threat that needs to be addressed in that way.

Another consequence of its political success in the Ministry of Defence is that it has achieved, almost stunningly accurately, 33 per cent. of defence expenditure, along with 33 per cent. for the Royal Navy and 33 per cent. for the Army. When I arrived as a special adviser at the Ministry of Defence and looked carefully at the statistics, I was amazed at how consistent that picture had been for a long time. The services had cleverly seemed to carve up the cake almost equally between them, as if, regardless of the strategic or technological circumstances, a deal had to be done between the chiefs of staff.

The Royal Air Force should be confident with names such as Trenchard, Harris and Dowding, and it should know, from the history of the 20th century, that there will always be a place for it, not least for the regimental ethos that supports such a terrific service to our country. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) in paying tribute to Sir Michael Graydon, who led the Royal Air Force through extremely difficult times. The manning figure today is 53,000, and four years ago, if my memory serves me correctly, it was 75,000. Yet it is still deploying the same front-line operational output as it did four years ago. That is a terrific tribute to the way in which Sir Michael Graydon has reorganised the Royal Air Force and implemented the "Front Line First" reforms, which, of all the services, were most painful for the Royal Air Force.

The Royal Air Force clearly has a place because of the importance today of air supremacy. If we examine the potential threats to the United Kingdom, we realise that it is obvious that we need air superiority to defend our island. The Air Force is the last defence before we have to rely on our nuclear deterrent. Conservative Members certainly want to retain that as a backstop, but the contribution made by the Air Force to the defence of our island should never be underestimated.

Let us consider the operations in which we are taking part and those in which we have taken part in the previous two decades. During the Falklands conflict, we only just managed to sustain air superiority over the supremely

brave Argentine pilots, who flew their aircraft to the very limit of their range. We were able to bear the casualties from the Sir Galahad because the operation was vital to our national interest and we had to resecure the defence of the Falkland islands, but what about the operation in Bosnia?

The Bosnian Serbs possessed one or two aircraft which they left sitting on the ground because they knew that, the moment they took off, they would be shot down. Let us imagine what would happen if that were not the case, if we did not have total air supremacy, and if we were made to suffer casualties like those involved with the Sir Galahad by an organisation that could get away with using one or two aircraft to score a spectacular hit, it becomes clear how important it is that we sustain the defence capability of the Air Force at the highest possible level that we can afford. That today means the Eurofighter. Several hon. Members have already commented on the need for Eurofighter, and I wholly agree.

Even further into the future, we are now looking at the joint strike fighter which is being developed with the United States. It is a terribly important partnership. It is also a good example of smart procurement, and the way the procurement is being handled—the way in which two industrial conglomerates' teams are together putting their rival schemes to the Pentagon—is a model that I am sure the Ministry of Defence will be examining.

Mention has been made of our increased need for strategic lift as we move towards an expeditionary force capability. There is clearly a case to made for the C17. I do not think we can afford the C5 which is the giant at the end of the strategic lift market, but the C17 seems extremely well suited to the needs of our armed forces. Four C17s could deploy an armoured reconnaissance squadron into theatre and have them deployed, including their echelon, into a battle position. That would be a very speedy way to get light armour on the ground to demonstrate a presence. The C17 can also move tanks and is an ideal complement to the C130J.

There have, of course, been problems with the introduction of the C130J but I and other members of the Select Committee on Defence have been given an assurance by senior executives at Lockheed that the final part of the C130J order will be delivered on time. The earlier part of the delivery schedule was delayed because Lockheed, by its own admission, took its eye off the ball and did not appreciate how difficult some aspects of the development of that aircraft would be. I should be glad to hear if the Minister knows otherwise, but I understand that Lockheed will deliver the last of the in-service fleet on time according to the original specification.

British Aerospace is constantly frigging around with the future large aircraft. I should like to point out to British Aerospace that there are times when things simply do not fit into the RAF's operational requirements schedule, and the FLA is one of them. We are shortly going to have to replace the C130Ks. The FLA has been a distraction, and, frankly, the previous Administration was guilty of giving the political nod to British Aerospace which ran extremely high-profile campaigns to keep the FLA in the game. As far as I remember, we did not commit more than thruppence ha'penny to the development programme, but it was a mistake anyway.

The C130J and the C17 give us two complementary capabilities, and it would be extraordinary if we brought a third major transport aircraft into the fleet. It would be a significant mistake. We should now make it clear that we are going with the C130J and should hold Lockheed to deliver the current tranche as agreed. I understand that we have a very good offer, in competitive terms, for follow-on buys, as we were the first military purchaser of the C130J .

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that, whereas the Lightning had two collaborative partners and the Eurofighter has four, the FLA is likely to have eight? That means more potential for political procrastination. The difficulty is in getting eight potential partners to agree to one programme.

Mr. Blunt: I agree to some extent. Quite legitimately, British Aerospace would say in response that Airbus, the civil side, has been a terrific success, so why cannot that be the model for the procurement of the FLA. However, the FLA is too unknown. It does not fit the operational needs of the Royal Air Force. If one challenges British Aerospace about whether we are really going to have three aircraft in the inventory, it says that it will buy the C130Js and lease them to other people to make room in the inventory for FLA. That is pretty incredible, and it cannot mean value for money, either for British Aerospace or the Ministry of Defence. I urge the Ministry to focus on a C17 and C130J mix.

Finally, I deal with support helicopters, and pick up my initial theme of how the Air Force organises itself. I want the Air Force as an institution to feel secure, but it has to be open to new ideas on how to reorganise its contribution to the whole defence effort. Support helicopters are a classic case of a capability that should belong to the Army. Clearly, we must find a home for the people who joined the services with the intention of flying fast jets but who, having gone through expensive training, were then found not quite to have the mental or physical capability to fly fast jets, although they are perfectly capable of flying transport aircraft or support helicopters. We do not want to waste all the training invested in those people, but do we really need an all-officer flying crew for something that is, frankly, the equivalent of a flying truck?

The Army Air Corps has non-commissioned officers who fly aircraft extremely well. I know from my own work that if we had the same rank structure flying the support helicopters of the Royal Air Force as are flying the helicopters of the Army Air Corps, who arguably fly more demanding missions involving combat and tactical decisions in the field, on capitation costs alone of the rank structure, we would save about £8 million a year.

Mr. Keith Simpson: My hon. Friend's theme is the maintenance of the morale of the RAF, and its heritage and history. He will know that, during the first and second world wars, the RAF had sergeant-pilots in operational fighting aircraft.

Mr. Blunt: That is true, and these days, we should look for the best flyers. In terms of flying attack or support helicopters, I am not sure that we must look to the officer corps to provide pilots.

I am afraid that I must return to the issue of the Chinook crash on the Mull of Kintyre. I share the concerns expressed in the House about the merits of

[Mr. Blunt]

the decision by the RAF board of inquiry, which has been supported by Ministers. It is beyond peradventure that, even without the voice data recorders from inside the support helicopter, the pilots were negligent—that is what has been said in the board of inquiry report. Frankly, it is almost impossible to achieve the standards asked for and, like other hon. Members, I hope the Minister will look at that matter again.

8.50 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It is a great pleasure to contribute to a debate which has been so erudite and well informed. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), and I associate myself with his comments on the Thrust SSC team who did so much to raise British morale and spirits recently.

I pay tribute also to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who attacked the present arrangements for the RAF's public relations department. He has won the prize as the first person in the UK to find an area in which the Government have under-invested in PR. That is surely notable.

On a less partisan note, I shared the sentiments that the Minister expressed in congratulating the RAF on its 80th anniversary, and his comments on the 50th anniversary of the Berlin airlift. In particular, I share his tribute to the former Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin who, in the role he played in the creation of NATO, the Berlin airlift and turning the Marshall plan from theory into fact, was the outstanding British Foreign Secretary of this century.

The Minister referred to low flying. Perhaps he thought that, with the debate coming towards its end, he had escaped without any constituency representations on the issue. However, the Minister and my constituents would be surprised if I made no reference to low flying. It is not true that in my constituency—in the southern part of the Lake district—there is unanimous concern about low flying. When letters appeared in the *Westmorland Gazette* a year or so ago from people suggesting that RAF aircraft were flying so low that it was possible to see the pilot from their bedroom, a 15-year-old boy wrote to the paper, saying that he was extremely jealous and that he wished he could inspect the site where those wonderful aircraft could be seen so close.

I fully accept that we cannot expect young men and women to put their lives in danger for us in combat and training without providing them with the ability to train in a low-flying environment within the UK. My constituents accept that our area is relatively underpopulated and should take a balanced share of that activity. Some concerns have been expressed by the Lake district national park authority and the Yorkshire dales national park authority that perhaps the amount of low flying we are getting is a little disproportionate. We do not attack the principle of it, but I hope that the Minister will bear in mind my representations. I hope that he will assure us that we are not getting more than our fair share.

The strategic defence review has been referred to. There is the potential for the Government to believe that one of the ways of having deployable air power is to have serious aircraft carriers. I very much support the idea of having serious aircraft carriers with proper aircraft flying off them. As Barrow-in-Furness is next door to my constituency—and, declaring a small interest, because my brother-in-law works at the Vickers shipyard there—I hope that it will be possible to build those carriers in Barrow.

One lesson we should learn from the 1920s—in contrast to the comments of the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann)—is that it would be a grave mistake in the context of joint operations to believe that only the RAF should fly aircraft off aircraft carriers. The Minister may recall that this was the position in the 1920s and early 1930s. It was regarded as a great mistake and it stunted the British lead in aircraft carrier technology. If that decision had not been reversed shortly before the outbreak of war, many people believe that the conduct of the early phase of the war could have been more disastrous than it was.

In the strategic defence review, I hope that the Minister does not repeat another mistake from the 1920s—the so-called 10-year rule, which was imposed by the Treasury in the first few years after the first world war on the assumption that there could be no serious external threat to the United Kingdom for a decade. Then, as now, the fact that the international climate seemed propitious did not mean that clouds could not rapidly gather in a blue sky. I hope that the review will put in place forces which will be flexible and appropriate enough to cope with a sharp and unexpected deterioration in the general international climate, as well as with occasional, but significant, out-of-theatre crises.

The Minister referred to the retirement of the RAF's nuclear capacity, the WE177 free-fall bombs. It is worth noting in the context of the various anniversaries we have marked that this will be a significant development in the history of the RAF which, for more than half of its existence, has had a nuclear role. From the battle of Britain, and before, the RAF has had a significant role in protecting our country, and we should pay tribute to its role in contributing to the nuclear deterrent, which has played a significant role in maintaining the peace and security of these islands.

The Minister said that it was the Government's policy that should there be clear progress towards genuine nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, the Government at some point would consider including the British nuclear deterrent—now solely Trident—within the negotiations. First, it is worth noting that a non-nuclear world is unattainable because the technology cannot be disinvented. With the internet and a scale of scientific exchange which would have been considered inconceivable in the 1940s, it is simply incredible to advance the proposition that the technology can be forgotten or controlled out of existence. We have had significant difficulties persuading, or enforcing, non-proliferation in one country—Iraq. We cannot believe that it is possible to do it across the world as a whole.

Secondly, I urge the Minister to reflect that a non-nuclear world is not necessarily desirable. If we compare the 50 years since the nuclear weapon was developed, with all its horrors and difficult moral challenges, with the 50 years before, we see that far fewer lives were lost in global conflict—even in medium-level conflict. I hope that the Government will not take the view without debate that a non-nuclear world is desirable, as real issues arise.

Hon. Members from both sides of the House have spoken extensively about procurement. I add my support to the passionate and compelling case made by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) for the Slingsby Firefly aircraft. I hope that the Minister can assure us that the aircraft will be assessed by exactly the same criteria and that he will go not for the cheapest option, but for the one that provides best value for money in terms of performance and long-term, as well as short-term, running costs.

Dr. Reid *indicated assent.*

Mr. Collins: I am glad to see the Minister nodding in response to that.

More broadly, procurement has an immense impact on aerospace, which is our most significant manufacturing industry. It is worth remembering that the Hercules, which has been mentioned many times in the debate, came into service in the late 1960s because a previous Labour defence review had cancelled the British alternative—the HS681.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot spoke of his support for supersonic vertical/short take-off and landing—again, we should note that that Labour defence review cancelled the P1154 Harrier. The Labour Government of the 1970s cancelled yet another supersonic carrier project, the AV16. The United Kingdom aerospace industry is inevitably concerned about Labour defence reviews, and I am not even taking into account the magnificent TSR2, which was cancelled in 1965 by a Labour Government that had pledged at the 1964 election—

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): That was before the hon. Gentleman was born.

Mr. Collins: It was, in fact, the year I was born.

The Labour Government pledged in 1964 that they would not scrap the TSR2. However, they not only cancelled it, but—in an act of immense spite that is still talked about in the aerospace industry—ordered that the construction jigs should be destroyed to prevent a future Government from revisiting that decision. There is a long history of concern in the industry about the impact of Labour defence reviews on its projects and viability.

I hope that, in considering the strategic defence review, the Government will consider how to preserve and enhance a manufacturing industry that not only is the United Kingdom's largest, but above all others gives us a technological lead in Europe and the world. The industry's potential should never be underestimated.

With my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot and other hon. Members from both sides of the House, I had the pleasure and privilege to attend a briefing by the Society of British Aerospace Companies, which pointed out that the British aerospace industry represented 70 per cent. of the value, in terms of market capitalisation, of the whole European industry. The Ministry of Defence and the RAF will inevitably have not only an interest but a great say in the discussions about the so-called Euroco—the consolidation of the European aerospace industry—so it is important that the Minister recognises that the United Kingdom should use its immensely powerful bargaining chips and interests.

We must not do what we have done so often before—be terribly reasonable Anglo-Saxons in the face of French obduracy and allow the French to win out. Concorde is always spelt with an "e" because the French insisted on it for ever and a day until they got their way. The 1967 Anglo-French variable geometry project did not last long because, once the French had got hold of British swing-wing technology, they decided that they no longer wanted to take part but would build the aircraft themselves. It has been difficult to bring the French into collaborative projects for military procurement. They are not part of the Tornado or Eurofighter projects because they always choose to go their own way unless they can dominate the venture and run it for themselves.

I strongly urge the Minister and his colleagues in other Departments not to blink when, in considering British procurement policy and the British aerospace industry, the French insist on terms. No deal is better than a bad deal, and any deal would be bad that transferred control over the British aerospace industry, which is the most competitive in Europe, to France or Germany, whose industries are far less competitive. I hope that the Minister can say something about that.

The debate about the future of the RAF will always concern not only its relationship with the other services, as we have heard, but whether the manned aircraft will continue to play a role on the battlefield.

It is important for the Minister not to fall into two possible traps. The first would be to underestimate the importance of advancing technology and the increasing cost of aircraft, about which the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) spoke. We can see the possible end point of that in the American B2 bomber, each one of which costs $2 billion.

That is pretty absurd by anyone's standards, and one could project ahead to a point at which the entire RAF budget would be taken up by a single aircraft procured in a single year. That is clearly not sustainable. In the early 1970s, the Americans had a lightweight fighter project that resulted in the F16, and it may be sensible to consider carefully the balance between quality and quantity, although no one would want our pilots to fly in anything but the finest aircraft.

British Aerospace says that its industry these days is 50 per cent. software, and that is probably increasing. Those who go through Euston station as often as I do—on travels back and forth to my constituency—will have seen from a large poster there that it is possible for any of us to fly an F22 via a personal computer game.

As such technology advances, along with the advances in remotely piloted vehicles, Tomahawk cruise missiles and other technologies, it is important not to underestimate the ways in which some of the functions performed by manned aircraft may be able to be replaced; but the second trap to which I referred is that fallen into by a previous Conservative Government: in the infamous defence White Paper produced by Duncan Sandys in 1957, he suggested that the future of the RAF lay entirely with deploying rockets and missiles, and he cancelled a whole range of military aircraft projects.

More than 40 years on, it is clear that that judgment was wrong. For as far ahead as we can foresee, there will be some role for manned military aircraft. Not only do we want British pilots flying British skies in RAF aircraft, but as much as possible of the technology and hardware should be British. I hope that the Minister will be able to contribute to that.

9.7 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I must at the outset declare three interests. First, if I were not to confess to having participated in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I would not be listened to very attentively. Secondly, I have a professional interest, inasmuch as I have run an aviation consultancy company of my own for many years; I have always regarded professionalism in both aviation and politics as essential if one is not to come to grief. Thirdly, RAF Northolt is in my constituency. I believe that it is the oldest flying station still in active operation. It goes back to 1915, before the formation of the Royal Air Force, and is still going strong.

This debate has been illuminated by hon. Members of all parties, many of whom have been fascinated by air power and recognise the immense debt of gratitude that we owe to the Royal Air Force for the security of our country. Some have served in the air cadets; some have had flying scholarships at civil flying clubs paid for by the Royal Air Force; some are graduates of university air squadrons; and some have been involved in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, grappling with their stomachs in extraordinary attitudes and at high g-forces and emerging to tell the House how exciting their experiences were and how marvellous are the men and women of the service with which they have become acquainted.

We should be remiss not to pay tribute to former hon. Friends who participated in our past debates. Bill Walker, the former Member for North Tayside, flew Tempest aircraft, the last piston-engined fighters in Royal Air Force service, and was a doughty champion of the air cadets. Lord Hardy of Wath did his national service in the Royal Air Force and has never lost his love for the service, and he maintains his intense interest in it to this day. Keith Mans, the former Member for Wyre, was a Vulcan captain. That was an important role because, with the Victor and the Valiant, the Vulcan formed the deterrent force that preserved the peace during the cold war. He is to become secretary of the Royal Aeronautical Society. How lucky the society is to have him. Lord Monro still fulfils the illustrious function of Inspector General of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and was a link with those who fought in the Royal Air Force in world war two.

In that connection, I cannot fail to mention as only one example of a generation to whom the House and the nation owe so much the late Wing Commander Laddie Lucas, who was Member for Brentford and Chiswick from 1950 to 1959, and commanded 249 Squadron in the defence of Malta in 1942. It was the highest-scoring squadron in the defence of the island, and he won the distinguished service order and the distinguished flying cross. He was encouraged to fight the 1945 general election and stood for West Fulham but did not beat Edith Summerskill. He returned to the Royal Air Force and brought back from France 180 bottles of champagne stowed underneath his fighter. In those days, it cost 12 shillings a bottle, and it was drunk at his wedding to the sister of Thelma Bader, the wife of Douglas Bader, of whom he wrote a wonderful biography, as he wrote so many books about the air war in world war two.

It is the 80th anniversary of the service. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) described in his book "Aces High" the life of combat pilots on the western front. Their lifespan was often measured in days or, if they were lucky, in weeks. They had little training and were courageous beyond our ken. It was not only on the western front but on the home front that they faced challenges. I found a poem in the Royal Air Force journal about Cranwell camp, HMS Daedalus, in 1916:

"There's sailors living in the huts
It fills my heart with sorrow.
With tear-dimmed eyes they say to me
It's Cranwell camp tomorrow.
Inside the huts live rats they say
As big as any goat.
Last night a sailor saw one
Trying on his overcoat.
It's miles away from anywhere
By Jove it is a rum one.
A man lived here for 50 years
And never saw a woman."

Times have changed. In 1920, the Royal Air Force college was founded and in 1933, the fine permanent buildings were established. Now, women officers are trained alongside their male counterparts, and the central flying school and the college of air warfare are also there. It is an outstanding centre of excellence.

In considering the history of the Royal Air Force, we should not forget the inter-war years. They were perhaps characterised by Trenchard's policy of air control, which those following the Iraqi crisis will understand. To symbolise that period, I thought most appropriate the early-day motion of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). A memorial to Flight Lieutenant Kinkead was erected on the 70th anniversary of his death. He flew in the Schneider trophy contest as a member of the Royal Air Force high speed flight. In the great war, he joined the Royal Naval Air Service, and later the Royal Air Force, gaining 32 aerial victories. Early-day motion 950 had 105 signatures. The Kinkead trophy is still awarded to this day at the Royal Air Force college at Cranwell.

The debate was opened by the Minister for the Armed Forces. It was perhaps a political dance of the seven veils—mysterious, tantalisingly unrevealing but, sad to say, much less exciting than the real thing. At the end of it, I wondered whether this was the same man who spoke in the Royal Air Force debate from the Opposition Dispatch Box a year ago. This time, his speech was much more inclusive—less incisive, but more inclusive. It included just about every kind of generality, but no answer to any question that I could gather was of concern to right hon. and hon. Members. At that opening stage, he made no observations about the RAF's equipment programme, which is central to its capabilities.

The Minister made some points that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) found interesting about the creation of a Defence Aviation Repair Agency, bringing together RAF St. Athan and Royal Naval station Fleetlands. I am sure that it is a sound move. I wonder whether it presages the creation of a joint support helicopter force, about which so much has been leaked in the press. If it does, I should have nothing against that, either. I am sure that it is a rational and logical development. I am also sure that the Minister is right to stress the importance of interoperability and integration.

As someone who has had the honour of taking two parliamentary delegations in the past three years to the Baltic states—first to Estonia and then to Latvia—let me say how much I welcome the initiative that the RAF is taking through the "Partnership for Peace" programme. That GR7 Harrier aircraft should have been out to Finland and the Baltic states as well as to Hungary, Bulgaria and Moldova, I find exciting. I am pleased that a Nimrod is going to the Baltic later this year. We should not forget Ukraine, which is pivotal to European security. It is exciting that, under the outreach programme, the RAF is to participate in the Kiev air show.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) mentioned the future of his station, and I must mention the future of mine. RAF Northolt is a station that fulfils a key role. It provides the transport of VIP personnel, Government Ministers and senior service officers. It is well located for the headquarters at Northwood, Bentley priory and High Wycombe and, of course, for Whitehall. It is important that it should remain in RAF hands. There should be no question of its becoming a sort of Heathrow north, with the RAF allowed to have just a little enclave.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury paid tribute to the work of the Defence Evaluation Research Agency armament and aircraft establishment at Boscombe Down. It is working at the frontier of aeronautics, proving aircrafts' worthiness for service use. It is the kind of institution that makes the United Kingdom a centre of military aviation excellence throughout the world. It is also the site of the Empire test pilots school.

My hon. Friend also stressed the importance of air cadets. So many hon. Members who have taken part in the debate have done the same, and I am glad that they have done so.

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) made a puzzling speech. A number of my hon. Friends have commented on it. I found it moving that he paid a tribute to his father, who worked on Lancasters, Hampdens and Wellingtons, but he did not appreciate the crucial role of the RAF in securing the air superiority and dominance that are necessary in modern warfare.

The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who is not like one of the socialising members of the Labour party, is not in his place because, I gather, he had to go to Buckingham palace. He spoke about the importance to Scotland and Northern Ireland of an air officer. We should note what he said. He also stressed the importance to the RAF of the ASTOR system for the provision of effective intelligence and the control and command that it provides through battlefield surveillance. Such functions will be needed whatever the international situation, and such a system is a potential peacekeeping asset. It has the potential to win wars, and it builds confidence.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) spoke with knowledge and commitment about the stores and distribution centre and the mountain rescue team at Stafford. Logistics is as crucial in modern operations as it always has been. I recently visited RAF Wyton and found that it had been transformed from the flying station that I knew into a centre for logistics command. The work there was as thrilling and exciting as, I am sure, the work that the hon. Gentleman witnesses in his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) spoke with great authority without in any way being didactic. I should like to re-emphasise a couple of his points. First, we should not go down the Canadian route because individual service identities are still immensely important. Above all, it would be much better if the Government felt able to publish the foreign policy baselines for the strategic defence review.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) went from the Air Training Corps into the airborne forces, and that demonstrates the importance of the corps in providing air-mindedness in the broadest sense. The hon. Gentleman supports the Firefly. It is an excellent aeroplane; otherwise, it would not be operating with the RAF and in the American service north and south of the US-Canadian border. Thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), I had the privilege of flying the 260 version and I have also flown lower-powered versions. It is a lovely aeroplane and I hope that it is chosen but, of course, the Royal Air Force will decide.

Like all my hon. Friends, my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made an excellent speech. It is remarkable how well they speak. My hon. Friend has a real understanding of the values and ethos of the service, and his acquaintance with the parliamentary armed forces scheme deepened the local service knowledge that he has acquired in Gloucestershire. He made an important contribution to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) is from the other side of the Kemble runway. I remember it because I used to fly Hunters from it. He made a marvellous speech, but he was far too eulogistic about me. He said that I spoke for 35 minutes in last year's debate, but I spoke for less than half that time. If I thought that I had spoken for 35 minutes, I should be seriously worried.

If the Minister remembers nothing else, he will at least remember my hon. Friend's comments about the sewers at Lyneham.

Mr. Gray: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend because I am greatly enjoying his speech. I have already been accused once of misleading the House and I am keen that that should not happen again. The *Official Report* for Thursday 6 February 1997 shows that my hon. Friend started to speak at 7.27 pm and that the hon. Member who followed him rose at 7.57 pm. I am afraid to say that that is exactly half an hour.

Mr. Wilkinson: Well, mathematics never was my strong point. I learned mine before the days of calculators. I do not know whether Bill Walker rose to speak or to intervene, but we shall study *Hansard*.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot—a flying scholar, as I said—gave us a lesson in the importance of air power as such. He also emphasised how crucial Eurofighter 2000 and short take-off vertical landing aircraft are for the future of the Royal Air Force. I believe that the joint striker-fighter will be a crucial element of bringing together the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, which are already flying together very effectively in joint air groups, as shown during the latest episode in the Gulf.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who spent much longer than I in the Ministry of Defence—that is why the Ministry of Defence has

[Mr. Wilkinson]

progressed so far and so fast—described from an historical perspective the nature of the Royal Air Force, and its importance to the country as a separate service. I was struck by his professional judgment, as a former regular Army officer, of the merits of the C17 heavy lifter. He also understood the potential of the C130J, which we hope will come into service in the relatively near future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) made a speech of great fluency, rationality and distinction. I have a house on top of the Pennines, and I rather like the low flying aircraft, but I realise that I am not typical. In a balanced and well-argued speech, my hon. Friend drew attention to the potential nuisance that continues to be caused to his constituents by Royal Air Force low flying aircraft. However, I feel that the Royal Air Force is managing the problem well. It goes out of its way to explain to hon. Members the precautions it takes, and how sensitive it is, in conducting those necessary operations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale did us all a service in reminding us of the crucial role that the Royal Air Force played in sustaining the peace during the cold war, when it was responsible for the nuclear deterrent. Now, of course, the WE177 is being phased out. During the cold war, the Healey axe—the abandonment of the 1154, the HS681 and the TSR2—were cataclysmic events for the service, and have led to the folk memory, which persists for good reason, to the effect that the Royal Air Force is not necessarily happy unless it has in power a Labour Government who have genuinely changed their attitude to defence.

We shall see whether Labour has changed its attitude when the defence review is finally published. Until then, we must suspend judgment. All I know is that the Royal Air Force is down to 53,000 men—to my mind, the absolute minimum. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot emphasised the importance of flying hours. Tornado F3 crews fly about 183 flying hours a year; Tornado GRI crews, 210; Harrier crews, 206; and Jaguar crews, 197.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot was right to say that we should keep the Jaguars. Those three squadrons are extremely cost-effective. The fact that I worked on the project when it was a prototype does not mean that I say so for sentimental reasons. Those squadrons proved themselves over Bosnia and in the Gulf war, and they are now acquiring the thermal imaging and laser designation system, and the hands-on throttle and stick. The aircraft has been upgraded extremely well at St. Athan, which the Minister visited. The Jaguar's cost per flying hour is only £13,000—markedly less than that of the Tornado, which is £23,000. The maintenance hours per flying hour are 12.2 for the Jaguar and 17 for the Tornado. I urge the Ministry of Defence to think very carefully before disbanding those two offensive support and one reconnaissance Jaguar squadrons, certainly until Eurofighter comes into service. We do not want a hiatus in the front line.

If the Minister is worried, may I suggest that the Royal Auxiliary Air Force could crew those aircraft. They might be operated at lower intensity, but it would make good sense. The Royal Auxiliary Air Force has played a crucial role in this period of diminished manpower strength in the service. As the regular manpower has declined, so the number of roles taken on by the Royal Auxiliary Air Force has increased.

How right my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire was to mention his casualty evacuation squadron, the Wiltshire squadron, which is an example of the imaginative new role that the auxiliaries are now taking on. They are reverting to their traditional flying role, which they had until 1957, although they do not yet have formed flying units.

The armed forces, particularly the RAF, have benefited from the Reserve Forces Act 1996, which we put in place at the end of our term of office. If offers a ready reserve and a sponsored reserve. That is the key to making contractorisation a success. I have seen at RAF Northolt occasions when it has not been a success. The 146 emergency landing at Stansted is a case in point. Then there was that ghastly business of the Airwork Tornados at St. Athan. However, we are moving forward.

If contractor personnel are subject to service discipline, can be required to wear uniform and can be called to the colours in emergency or war, many of the inhibitions to their cost-effective use can be removed. That is why I would also urge sponsored reserve engineering personnel. I have seen, as has the Minister, how well RAF St. Athan works. It is crucial to be able to augment capacity in time of emergency or war. St. Athan provides that. We must have a balance between regulars, reservists and contractors. That is the way forward.

The Royal Air Force needs above all to maintain its integrity. It must maintain its principles of service before self and its overriding doctrine that only the highest standards will suffice. The service is looking resolutely to the future.

I hope that, in Whitehall, it is understood that command of space is just as crucial for war winning in the future and for the prevention of war as is control of the air. Before too long, we shall face the necessity of putting into place a ballistic missile defence system for our country, and I hope that it is under serious consideration.

The quality of a country's armed forces reflects a nation's self-esteem. The value that a nation places on its liberty and its institutions is reflected in the quality of the armed forces that serve it. We are extremely fortunate in having in the RAF a service of the very highest quality.

9.33 pm

Dr. Reid: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I say—I am sure the House will agree—how good it was to see the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) at the Dispatch Box. For many years I have listened to his speeches from the Back Benches—always short, sharp and concise, and, in my experience, never running to more than 17 minutes. Although it is form to pay such tributes, on the occasions that I have listened to him, the sincerity, passion and patriotism that he brings to these issues has shone through whatever he has said, whether from the Front or the Back Benches.

The hon. Gentleman's speech tonight, and also that of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who opened for the Opposition, shows that it is possible to develop—over time, and not without pain, anguish and the biting of tongues—a consensual framework on national security

and defence issues. That does not mean that hon. Members on either side of the House have to be bland or uncritical or enter into a form of bondage to the other side.

I think that tonight's debate is the best that I have heard. Although the contributions have been small in number, their quality has been very high—as they say in Scotland, good gear comes in small bulk. I thank the hon. Member for Salisbury for his compliments about my collective, inclusive, caring, sharing, consumer-friendly speech—what a pity that he added that I did not answer any of his questions. I shall now attempt to do that, starting with what I know to be the most important. I have taken immediate advice from my officials about those questions that I cannot answer and instructed them to find out the answers.

The first question, which I know is of particular importance to Conservative Members, was raised by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who asked about the temperature of the chardonnay served in the office of the Minister for the Armed Forces. I have taken immediate advice about that, and I understand—of course, I am not in breach of the convention that we should not ask about our predecessors—that, in days past, claret was the order of the day and that it was best served at the slightly warmer end of the scale. While I am on the subject, I ask Conservative Members to thank their friends for the Christmas gifts of quails' eggs, claret and grilled rare species, but I would be grateful if they would tell them that there is a new Minister for the Armed Forces.

I shall deal with one or two of the myths that were put about today. On the question of news management, I hope that hon. Members will not assume that every mistake that appears in the *Sunday Times* is the fault of the Ministry of Defence. We do not have enough people or time to create or be responsible for every mistake that appears in the Sunday newspapers. I assure the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) that some of the detail that appears in the Sunday papers is news to me as well as to him. Like any Government Department, we like to present our case, but we are not into spin. This is a serious Department of State, and it will be treated seriously by this Administration.

Several hon. Members referred generally to inter-service rivalry. I pay tribute to the three services, from the chiefs of staff—Dick Johns in the Air Force, Jock Slater in the Navy, and Roger Wheeler in the Army—down. There has been unparalleled openness and a willingness to look critically, to learn and to be flexible, and all the politicians involved have agreed with every outcome that has been achieved. Politicians, the military, civil servants and the wider services have made a genuine attempt to co-operate, and I dispute any suggestion—through leaks and so on—that there have been any significant inter-service rivalries. The services are a credit to their country, and that bodes well for their future integrated operation.

Mr. Gray: I am happy to accept the Minister's assurances that there are no inter-service rivalries. Does that apply also to the Regular Army and the Territorial Army? Will he assure the House that, if there are heavy cuts in the Territorial Army in the SDR, they are in no way the result of the Regular Army's involvement in the committees?

Dr. Reid: An obvious distinction between the Regular Army and the Territorial Army is that the Territorial Army and most of its components have the freedom to lobby publicly. The TA can send letters to Members of Parliament and urge them to defend the TA against the Regulars in debates. It can hold rallies and send the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve. The regular Army does not have that luxury: that is the obvious difference between the reserve forces and the Territorial Army and the regulars.

I would like to think that the contribution made by those in charge—particularly Richard Holmes, to whom the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) referred—has been constructive. I hope that it has been protective of the Territorial Army, not in terms of what it has achieved in the past but in terms of what it can give us today, tomorrow and in the future. Richard Holmes has done a stalwart job.

I shall single out one speech—mainly because I agreed with the three main points in it. I refer to the contribution made by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins). To my knowledge, I had not heard the hon. Gentleman speak before this evening. I was most impressed—as, I think, was the House. I made inquiries and was told that, by reputation, he is one of the bright young men of the Conservative party. If that is his reputation, all I can say, at risk of doing him down, is that he deserves it.

The hon. Gentleman's presentation—on Ernest Bevin, on the potential for the emerging threat, on the experience of the 10-year rule of the 1930s—along with the balanced way in which he approached the deterrent and the dishonesty that would ensue if we were to try to create the illusion that there are immediate foreseeable chances of a nuclear-free world, was highly meritorious.

The hon. Member for Salisbury, who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, raised some extremely important points. I am grateful to him for conveying to us, as he sometimes does in private, some of the worries and concerns that perhaps people do not express to a Minister. We all know, as Billy Connolly once said, that the Queen thinks that the world smells of fresh paint. Wherever Her Majesty goes, someone is presenting the best side of life.

The RAF achieved close to 90 per cent. of last year's recruitment target—not 100 per cent., and we need 100 per cent. However, some branches and trades are traditionally unattractive to recruits, and I think that 90 per cent. was a formidable result. We are actively considering ways further to maximise recruitment to the service to meet this year's target of 4,300 personnel.

I accept that there is tremendous competition from outside, especially from British Airways and other commercial firms, which are looking for a significant number of pilots. That is not being ignored. We are actively developing schemes that we hope will result in our getting three or four more years out of each individual in the RAF. It is when people reach 33 or 34 that problems occur. The schemes that we are developing will help private firms to plan ahead and, simultaneously, will give security to individual pilots at the age of 33 or 34. They will know that in a few years' time they will have a job. I do not want to go into any further detail. As I have said, we are actively working on developing appropriate schemes.

The hon. Member for Salisbury talked about single service debate timing. That is a matter for discussion through the usual channels. The hon. Gentleman raised

[Dr. Reid]

the more important issue of RAF family concerns. I understood that there was to be ministerial involvement at the RAF wives conference. I met the Army Families Federation. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary was to be involved with RAF family concerns, but then had to make new arrangements to be at the cenotaph as the Government's representative on ANZAC day. I understand that that was all within the past few days. No further rearrangement has been possible.

The hon. Gentleman referred to complaints about treatment received by wives of RAF personnel from the Department of Social Security. These are wives who return to the United Kingdom and are looking for a job. They meet some difficulties because they have not been deemed available for work while they have been moving around. I have already given the hon. Gentleman assurances that I shall raise the matter. From memory, I have already written to the Department of Social Security in an attempt to take up the issue.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) talked about strategic lift and heavy lift. As for the future fleet mix—whether to buy more C130Js or C17s, for example—the hon. Gentleman must await the outcome of the strategic defence review, as he would expect me to say. The mix is obviously an important part of the strategic development of our forces in general. On whether to buy more C130Js or C17s, and so on, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman must await the outcome of the SDR, but we are looking at that mix as an important part of the strategic development of our forces in general.

Specifically on C130Js, they are late, but Lockheed intends to deliver the aircraft more quickly than it has. We will, of course, put in a claim against Lockheed for delays in getting the aircraft into service, and that will accrue to the RAF.

The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who is no longer with us, referred, as did the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood, to the position of Air Officer Commanding Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have noted what they said and will ensure that it is taken into account, with other issues that were raised, in the final outcome of the strategic defence review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) raised the issue of the storage depot at Stafford. I should like to associate myself with the tributes that he paid to the people working there.

I return to an issue that was raised by almost every hon. Member in a more general sense than just the C130Js—heavy lift. We have inherited a shortfall in strategic lift capability. The SDR is determined to find out what action is needed on airlift and sealift to address the issue.

The Government believe that the future large aircraft could be a capable aircraft. The decision on whether it is the solution to our future transport needs will be made in the light of the review's conclusions. The competition between the C17 and the FLA is important, because it will help us to make our final decision in the SDR. I cannot go much further on the point that the C17 would be a better aircraft than the FLA, as it is premature to speculate on the eventual solution, but I can assure the House that most of the points made tonight have not only been taken into account but were debated vigorously over time.

The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) was in emollient mood tonight. He made his usual constructive interventions. I knew that there was no aggression coming from him, because his moustache was not twitching. We all exhibit different signs when filled with adrenaline, and I knew that the static moustache position tonight meant that he would make a constructive contribution. He raised a point about the policy baseline. I had responded to that earlier—obviously, in his view, thoroughly inadequately, although since in his perception I so often respond thoroughly inadequately, I will not bore the House by going through all the speeches made by the Secretary of State, even if some hon. Members would like me to.

The question of Hawk availability, in particular in relation to RAF Valley, was raised by the hon. Member for Salisbury and several others. I said, perhaps in a non-consensual spirit, that, if some of the problems that they were identifying were true today, they were problems that some of us had identified some years ago. Indeed, some Opposition Members made the point about future contracts and the private sector being able to bid for a tender previously held by the RAF. Companies in the private sector could put in a cheaper tender because they know that they could recruit RAF specialists who are already trained, and pay them less because they have an RAF pension.

I am aware, because I have been down to RAF Valley a number of times and have discussed this with the people involved, that there has been a shortfall in the provision of sufficient aircraft from the maintenance lines to meet the flying requirement. That is a serious matter, and one that concerns me.

A key contributory factor has been the contractor's difficulty in recruiting sufficiently experienced personnel. In fairness to the contractor, it would also say that one of the problems was that we had contracted to supply a number of Hawks which we did not ultimately supply. But I can tell the House that the RAF is working closely with the contractor to resolve the position. To some extent, they are teething problems, and they are being overcome. They will not be fully overcome this year—and perhaps not even next year in terms of the training hours that we envisaged at the beginning. Therefore, we are also looking outside RAF Valley to see where we might achieve access to other Hawks or to more training hours.

On the brighter side, in the main the operation has been a success. About £5 million has been delivered in annual savings. However, I do not want to think that the story is over. When the contracts come up for renewal, we may find, in line with the strictures of the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), that we have to have regard to the longer-term costings as well as the short-term costings, and that we have to take into account morale, which is hard to evaluate, skills and training and research capacity. All those are thrown in with uniformed personnel.

One of the ways of proceeding is to look at the sponsored reserve, which the previous Government put through the Reserve Forces Act 1996, which I supported at the time and still do. Another is to consider the experience of privatisation. I assure the House that we do not approach that ideologically. We do not take the view

that everything must be retained in-house or pushed out of house. We judge the matter as best we can on the merits and in the light of experience.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My key point about contractorisation was about the need to ensure that, when the contracts are renewed, there are sufficient trained people for the future contract to be renewed at a reasonable price.

Dr. Reid: Yes, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I thought that that was the point that I was referring to just before I referred to him. I included him as having raised that point.

With regard to the future offensive air system raised by several hon. Members, we are studying a range of options. As all hon. Members want a timetable, we shall try to avoid both extremes against which we have been warned. We expect to be in a position to make a decision on the way forward around the turn of the century. I shall not, therefore, be making any predictions on that tonight. However, we are well aware of the longer-term importance of the project to the defence aerospace industry, and it will be one of the many factors taken into account in deciding the way forward on the future offensive air system.

The hon. Member for Aldershot—and, I think, one other hon. Member—referred to the important beyond-visual-range missile project. That will also be somewhat delayed, not because of the strategic defence review, but because contracts for project definition risk reduction work and the BVRAAM air-to-air missile for Eurofighter were placed with Hughes, now Raytheon Systems, and Matra-BAe in August 1987. We expected a decision on placing a development and production contract, but not, I regret, until the summer of 1999. I take on board the points made by the hon. Gentleman, particularly given that Eurofighter is linked with the decision on which missile, and when one considers the implications for the export of Eurofighter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and several others raised the question of Chinook and the Mull of Kintyre, as did the Opposition spokesman. That is a matter of great sensitivity, on which no one can ever say that the decision has been taken, that minds are closed or that, whatever happens, nothing can ever change.

My approach has been, even at great cost of myself, to study all the aspects as much as I can within the time limits placed on me. If new relevant and substantial information comes to us, we shall look at the matter again. I have no problem with hon. Members contining to ask questions. I am still dealing with questions, and the hon. Member for Salisbury, who came to see me on the matter, still has to give me a number of detailed points to which he wants answers. The matter is on-going, but my position remains as it was. I have no monopoly on infallibility—any more than anyone else has—but, at the moment, there is no reason to reopen the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) mentioned the important and sensitive subject of the Bulldog replacement project. Hon. Members will forgive me if I do not respond to each matter that was raised, because that would be inappropriate for such a contract and it would be unfair to both sides to go through the issues in a public forum.

I shall make a decision very soon, and it will be based on the best value for money for the aircraft that does the job best. As the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood requested, I shall pay great attention to what the experts—the RAF, which will have to use the aircraft—have to say. I do not want to go further than that, but I hope that hon. Members will not have to wait much longer for an answer, with which they may or may not agree and which will not have been reached without great study.

On the question of morale, Ministers accept that the RAF has been going through a difficult period of change for several years. If the hon. Member for Salisbury thinks that morale is fragile, he should have seen it three years ago. As the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife acknowledged, it was at rock bottom. Morale in the RAF is better than it was then. There is instability and insecurity, which is understandable because of the defence review, but we should note that air power remains a crucial element of our defence capability.

From my contacts with them, I believe that RAF personnel are generally content with their professional employment. There are attractions outside the RAF, but I have spoken to people who have gone as pilots to the civil sector. As in any job, the grass always looks greener on the other side. People have left the RAF to shuttle between Glasgow and Edinburgh three times a day. In the RAF they had job satisfaction and commitment to public service, and the surge of adrenalin brought about by the feeling that they were doing well not only for their country, but for the world. Some people with new jobs sometimes feel that they would rather be back in the RAF—there are attractions to the service.

The shortfall in manning, which we inherited and which we shall do our best to get rid of over the next few years, is 3.4 per cent., or 1,850 people. I hope to reduce it to about 1.2 per cent., or 600 people, by April 1999.

Several hon. Members asked about retention. I have said that we already have detailed plans under way. I entirely agree with the points made by the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood and several other hon. Members about the cadets. The cadets are good not just as a recruiting source for RAF officers, but as a major contribution to young people: they provide opportunities and help to develop, mould and shape future initiative and character. I want the cadets to continue to thrive.

Eurofighter is needed. The Warsaw pact-produced aircraft and the countries that obtained them are a direct threat to our forces, and we must give them the best, because, with the RAF, we have the best personnel. I express again the congratulations and deep gratitude not only of the House but of this country's people for 80 years of solid, absolute commitment by the RAF.

Mr. Gray: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did indeed mislead the House slightly earlier when I claimed that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) had spoken for 30 minutes last year. On careful reflection and looking at *Hansard* even more carefully, I realised that I had missed the fact that someone else had spoken in that time and that my hon. Friend did, indeed, speak for only 17 minutes. I regret the fact that I misled the House on that point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I am sure that the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) has noted the hon. Gentleman's apology.

It being Ten o'clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Dibden Bay, Southampton

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

10 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I am delighted to have been selected for this Adjournment debate. I too have a small apology to make. Because, I imagine, of my handwriting in submitting my request for the Adjournment debate, as some people may have noticed, the Order Paper earlier stated that the proposal was to discuss Dibdon bay. I see that the immensely clever people who write the Order Paper have, through their erudition rather than my assistance, now amended that to the correct spelling. I apologise if the House had been misled.

This debate is about not just a bay, however we spell its name, but the viability of a great UK port and the future of UK ports in general. My aim is to place several arguments on the record, so that the local discussion, when it comes, will consider all the issues: local amenities, environmental concern, transport links and national and indeed international issues relating to shipping in ports.

I emphasise at the outset that no detailed planning proposal for Dibden bay has yet been submitted. I am therefore not asking the Minister to pronounce on a particular proposal; I would be most surprised if she did. However, I hope that she will join me in emphasising the importance of effective UK ports, because that is the heart of the issue.

Where does the issue start in the case of Southampton? Dibden bay sounds a very romantic place. It was historically a bay, but it is now effectively a large area of reclaimed land, situated between Marchwood military port and Hythe marina on the western side of Southampton water. It is owned by Associated British Ports and was reclaimed in the 1940s, with further reclamation in the 1980s.

ABP proposes to build a new container terminal with 1,850 m of quay on the site, and to provide a purpose-built rail terminal and an access road carriageway to service it. Although the land is entirely reclaimed and does not form part of the heritage area of the New forest, the mudflats in front of it are of environmental significance. ABP proposes to construct a 40-hectare creek to create new inter-tidal mudflats, together with an extensive area of landscaping. I understand that those proposals have already been discussed in some detail with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The proposal has strong advocates and strong opponents in the Southampton area. I am obliged to my parliamentary colleagues, the hon. Members for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) for writing to me expressing their sorrow at being unable to attend the debate. They take a different view from me, but it is based, among other things, on the impact of the proposals on the New forest area. That is understandable, and I expect them to do their job as constituency Members of Parliament. The impact on the area is my concern also.

I hope that those hon. Members will listen carefully to the issues I have raised and think carefully about the consequences of the wider issues of development upon

Southampton port, which include the validity of the case for port expansion in Southampton and the significance of hub ports in the rapidly changing world of container shipping. I accept that there are real environmental and transport concerns about the proposals, but I hope that my contribution can focus the debate at the right level of concern. We should properly take immediate local issues into account.

We have a duty to ensure that development takes place with the least practical environmental damage, but we must also look at the wider national and international case when deciding whether to support the aims of the proposals. I understand that the immediate view might be to regard grass as clean and environmentally friendly and ports as dirty and industrial. However, an effective ports policy and the possibility of transporting much of the United Kingdom's freight by sea from hub ports is an immense potential environmental gain. Transporting a tonne of freight over a kilometre of sea is 20 times more effective in energy terms than transporting the same amount by road. The issue is perhaps not as clear cut as we might think at first glance.

In order to understand the essence of the issue, we need to understand the role of ports in the United Kingdom economy. To do so, we must realise what is happening in the world of container shipping. Ships are getting larger, and are delivering loads assembled from a large area and intended for distribution to equally large areas. Ships traverse the globe, carrying an ever larger number of containers, and they require the facilities to berth them.

The latest generation of ships, already built and operating, can take up to 8,000 boxes. They can be handled only by ports with a strong infrastructure and sufficient water and wharfage. Those ports will need to be able to distribute loads efficiently, and must therefore have good road and rail links. Above all, they must have good deep-water access. They are likely to be required close to the main deep sea shipping routes between Europe and the rest of the world.

Probably only three ports will fully fit the requirements by early next century—Southampton, Thamesport and Felixstowe. Those are firmly established international trends now. This method of transporting large quantities of bulk freight will not go away.

I have recently received a copy of a letter from the leader of the county council which was sent to local Conservative Members in Hampshire. He says:

"Our understanding is that the need for the development"

of Dibden bay

"hinges very much on trade with the Far East. Only a moment's reflection suggests that, with the present upheaval and turmoil in the Far Eastern economies, this may not be the best time to make decisions about a capital project with a pay-back period of many decades. I think our present view would be 'wait and see' . . . I should certainly welcome your views on the prudence of making decisions at a time of uncertainty about the future performance of the Far Eastern economies and their trade patterns."

I must tell the leader of Hampshire county council that that bizarre argument cannot go unchallenged.

It is simply fanciful to believe that the fact that the Japanese and far eastern economies are in some difficulty will alter the fixed pattern of container shipping from the far east to the UK—that suddenly the large container ships will disappear or not come to the UK. That is out of the question. Indeed, if we take that argument on board and indulge in short-term thinking, we will potentially throw away our stake in the UK's industrial future.

Ninety-five per cent. of the United Kingdom's imports and exports go through ports. We must get our ports policy right in the long term, by doing the thinking now. Hub ports are at the heart of that thinking. They will serve as the prime ports of entry, redistributing to either other UK ports or UK inland destinations, and receiving goods for shipment in return. Trade is likely to be concentrated on those ports, but there are problems—the capacity of the hub ports, for example, and the structure of world container shipping lines. Together, they present a difficult scenario for those who believe that our ports can stay as they are.

If the new generation vessels cannot dock or discharge, not only will those ships that will go elsewhere, but the lines and consortiums operating them will naturally base their operations on particular ports. They will take the whole of their business to other ports. In other words, there will be no such thing as a static hub port. Hub ports will either have to evolve to meet the new shipping challenges, or they will almost certainly shrink rapidly.

The consequences for Southampton are obvious. Currently, the port of Southampton is almost full, if we include the present roll-on/roll-off and bulk services in the picture. It has no land or wharfage on which it can develop at its present site. According to the argument I outlined, it will either consolidate its role as a national hub port with Dibden bay or it will shrink to only regional significance without it.

There are also severe consequences for the UK economy of a failure to deal with the need for effective hub ports. Ships entering the English channel from deep-sea voyages can, in effect, turn left or right to unload. That is not a terribly nautical term, but it sums up the choices available to ships entering the English channel. They can berth in England or in Rotterdam, Antwerp, or, perhaps, Le Havre. Ports in France, Belgium or Holland that can offer good facilities will capture hub trade from the UK.

The French Government have recently shown that they take the issue seriously, and that they will continue to subsidise their main ports. Commissioner Kinnock is pursuing the issue of a level playing field for ports, but we should not underestimate the threat of continental competition on major UK ports.

Containers arriving in Rotterdam can be transhipped or sent to the UK by a combination of sea and rail, but only at a cost. That cost is estimated to be a premium of about £100 per box, so, if our long-term policy succeeds in driving that traffic to turn right when it enters the English channel, we will, among other things, add considerably to the cost of UK industry, with all the consequences that that entails.

My central case is therefore that we need a strategic view of ports policy. I hope that the Government will tackle the issue in the forthcoming White Paper on integrated transport. We need to ensure that there is a full debate on the exact plan, infrastructure and environmental design of any development on Dibden bay. It is proper that ABP should fund all those elements which will make the eventual design work satisfactorily, although I have to say that that does not appear to be the case currently with other European ports often in direct competition to Southampton.

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

I suspect that the question whether in the European Union we should subsidise all or none of our ports is one for another day, but the debate on Dibden bay is more immediate. It will be entered into shortly, and I know that environmental concern will be a prime weapon.

An environmental policy on ports would be greatly helped by a clear definition of what the country needs in terms of port facilities. We know now that demand for development in each of the three emergent UK hub ports will be considerable. The options will not concern development at Southampton; or, failing that, Thamesport; or, failing that, Felixstowe. They will come down to the choices we make to allow a hub and feeder port strategy to work overall in the UK.

In the 1980s, there was a free-for-all in port development. If someone had money and saw the chance to capture business, that was okay with the Government of the day. We got superfluous terminals in inappropriate parts of the country, sometimes at great environmental cost.

A proper view of strategic need would put an end to the practice of considering each proposal as if it were on a planet all by itself. Areas in other estuaries in the UK will remain untouched as a result of a proper ports policy. That must be a gain for those who want to see industrial development tempered with environmental considerations. We will have within our grasp the ability to move freight by far more appropriate environmental means. These are real gains, which can be made by thinking holistically. I hope that that is what we will do in the upcoming debate on the development of Dibden bay.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) on obtaining this debate on Associated British Ports' important development plans at Dibden bay, Southampton. As my hon. Friend chairs the all-party group on ports, it is hardly surprising that his cogent and informed speech touched on issues and interests that ranged wider than those of particular interest to his constituents.

My hon. Friend spoke of the importance of Associated British Ports' operations to Southampton and the surrounding region. There is no doubt that the prosperity of the port is closely linked to that of the city. In connecting the UK not only with Europe but with the rest of the world, the port plays an important part.

I understand that research commissioned by Hampshire county council and Southampton city council in 1994 confirmed that the port is a major contributor to the economy of Southampton and the region. Another report estimated that 13,000 jobs were directly dependent on port activities, with a further 2,000 to 4,000 dependent on the expenditure of port-related companies and their employees.

In total, port-dependent activities were estimated to account for around 6 per cent. of all employment in the Southampton travel-to-work area—an area which experienced a significant loss of manufacturing capacity and employment in the 198Os, compounded by reductions in defence expenditure in the 199Os. Therefore, the full-time and semi-skilled jobs provided by the port are particularly valuable.

The port has continued to prosper. In 1996, annual traffic had risen to a record 34.2 million tonnes, including nearly 6.8 million tonnes of container and roll-on/roll-off traffic, accounting for over 6 per cent. of total trade through UK ports. The port is an increasingly busy operation, which also reflects substantial investment through the opening of new facilities and of latest developments in cargo-handling technology. This investment, together with the port's natural deep-water advantages and geographical position, has enabled it to compete successfully in a very competitive market.

An important issue facing ABP is how to maintain and build on this success in the light of international trends towards bigger ships and fewer but larger international hub ports in Europe. ABP's response has been to promote expansion of handling capacity through Dibden bay. The commercial and financial feasibility of proceeding in this way is primarily a matter for ABP, but proposals of this kind inevitably raise a wide range of planning and environmental issues.

Although ABP has not so far submitted applications for the necessary consents, I know that there have been discussions with environmental bodies, the relevant local authorities and my officials in preparation for a public consultation exercise, possibly leading to the submission of consent applications later this year. Procedures are complex, as various consents are required under different legislation. A local public inquiry will almost certainly be held, with the final decision resting with the Secretary of State.

My hon. Friend did not expect me to pronounce on any particular proposal, about which I am relieved, as it would be improper for me to express any view now on the merits or otherwise of proposals for the development of Dibden bay. The public inquiry will address the relevant issues, including environmental impacts, economic benefits and conformity with development plans and with national policy. However, it may be helpful if I say something generally about these issues, without prejudice to future decisions on any formal proposals from ABP.

My hon. Friend raised a number of points about the Government's general policy towards ports and port developments. As the House knows, we plan to publish later this spring a White Paper setting out the Government's integrated transport policy. It will show how our policies can improve the role of the United Kingdom's transport system in supporting employment and sustainable economic growth, as well as protecting the environment. It will also suggest ways in which the best use of ports and shipping can be promoted.

Recognising the importance of shipping, and concerned at the decline in the British merchant fleet, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last year set up a shipping working group to examine how the decline could be reversed. He is now considering the working group's report, with a view to publishing his conclusions after the White Paper.

As our recent response to the European Commission's Green Paper on ports and maritime infrastructure made clear, we will continue to support policies that encourage competition and efficiency in the ports industry on a fully commercial basis. We shall also ensure fair employment

standards and better, more effective regulation of safety and the environment. It is important to recognise that our ports are competing vigorously, both in the United Kingdom and in the European market. We therefore support measures to develop a level playing field throughout Europe, which is why we broadly support the principles in the Green Paper.

I reassure my hon. Friend that the Government recognise the importance to the United Kingdom of our ports. They are a vital link in the supply chain, with, as he said, some 95 per cent. of our international trade by volume—moreover, considerable domestic traffic goes through them. We must ensure that ports are integrated into our transport networks in ways that contribute to the achievement of a more effective and more environmentally friendly transport system.

Our ports cannot be developed in isolation. Virtually all ports depend upon freight movements by road. Many have rail access, and some support the movement of people, mostly in their cars or private coaches. Policies for these modes need, in turn, to reflect the role of ports.

Our broad aims are to ensure that ports play a full role in supporting the competitiveness of their regions, and that any port development is sympathetic to the surrounding natural environment and local communities. We must also ensure that greater use is made of rail and water links where they are practical and economic options, although it would be foolish to pretend that road connections will not continue to play a very important role.

The ports industry is diverse; the supply chains it serves are even more so. Demand for their services is derived—their customers have varied and changeable requirements. The shipping industry operates in a highly competitive world market on very tight margins, and is sensitive to minor and unpredictable international economic, political and commercial factors.

Nevertheless, as my hon. Friend said, some trends are clear, notably the strong and continuing increase in the use of freight containers and road trailers—unitisation—as opposed to the carriage of goods in semi-bulk form. Container ships are now larger, and have access to only a few ports, with deeply dredged access channels. As my hon. Friend pointed out, internationally, the shipping industry is concentrating on hub ports for its main liner services, with other ports providing only feeder services.

Last year, Southampton served eight container lines, and handled 893,000 units. Three quarters of that business is with the far east—indeed, the port handles half our far east trade by volume.

There are pressures on capacity, but ports have shown a considerable ability to absorb additional traffic without physical expansion. Development pressures remain, of which the Dibden bay proposal is an instance. It also clearly illustrates the sensitivity of port expansion projects, since protected habitats are liable to be affected.

There is no doubt that the Solent area is outstanding in nature conservation terms. There are many sites of special scientific interest in the area, and proposals for four international conservation designations under the habitats directive will shortly be considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when discussions arising from the consultation are concluded.

It is surely right that any plan or project should be assessed in the light of a proper evaluation of its possible adverse effects. The aim should be to mitigate and compensate for those, in order to maintain the quality of our environment and its biodiversity. Transport projects are not an exception: land take and other environmental impacts of new transport infrastructure have been very significant. We aim to minimise them in future, and to ensure that environmental effects are taken fully into account in investment decisions.

The habitats directive, which sets out the safeguards for the internationally important sites it will protect, emphasises the importance of sustainable development. Any plan or project that will affect the integrity of such a site can, in the absence of alternatives, be approved only on grounds of overriding public interest, and with the provision of compensatory measures.

The directive imposes those specific tests for any development that may affect internationally important wildlife sites. I believe that the tests represent a logical extension to those special sites of the principles that I have outlined. I understand that ABP Southampton has already been discussing informally with English Nature its plans for Dibden bay, with a view to minimising or removing the impacts on the local bird populations and habitats.

There will also be a range of planning issues to consider at Dibden bay. The 1994 regional planning guidance identified Southampton as one of the most important ports in the country. The guidance also recognises that the ports industry generally needs to continue to adapt to changes in patterns of international trade.

Hampshire county council's structure plan is in the process of being revised. When a new plan is adopted, it will provide guidance for development in Hampshire at a strategic level well into the next century. It will identify the general pattern of development and provide a set of policies to enable communities, businesses and institutions to know where to invest in Hampshire.

The draft structure plan deposited in 1996 proposed a policy to allow, exceptionally, for port development at Dibden bay where such development is in the interest of the regional and national economy. However, the Government office for the south-east, on behalf of the Secretary of State, objected to the policy, on the grounds that it was overly restrictive. The panel, known as "Examination in Public", that conducted the structure plan review in which the policy was discussed, has subsequently reported to Hampshire county council, and recommended that the policy be modified to provide a more positive approach to port development.

The county council has published the panel's report for information, but it has not yet formally determined how to respond to any of the recommendations, including on the Dibden bay policy. It is the responsibility of Hampshire county council, jointly with the two unitary authorities of Portsmouth and Southampton, to decide what modifications to propose to the deposited review plan in the light of the panel's report. We wait with interest to learn what shape the Dibden bay policy will take.

In the emerging New forest district local plan, Dibden bay has been identified by the local planning authority as a site of importance for nature conservation, which means that the local authority considers that the area is of critical importance for nature conservation within the district. It is also identified as being within a strategic gap.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

The inquiry into objections to the local plan has now been completed, and the inspector is expected to report this summer. It will be for New Forest district council to decide what account to take of any recommendations that the inspector may make on the issue.

Environmental concerns are not confined to the marine habitats proposed for designation under the habitats directive. Road and rail access are also likely to be important issues for Dibden bay. I understand that a road link is proposed with the A326, a local authority road, and that Associated British Ports is seeking to resolve the issues that that raises with the county council.

I understand that ABP is also in discussions with Railtrack over improvements to the rail infrastructure. Wherever practicable, we want to get more freight on to rail, and we are working to establish more effective and accountable regulation and to establish a new rail authority to provide clear, coherent strategic programmes for the development of the railways, so that the aspirations of rail freight operators and users can be met.

We have already taken action to boost take-up of freight grants, and that is proving successful. We are also considering what else might be done to boost rail freight in the context of the integrated transport policy White Paper. Southampton port, which has good existing, albeit partially under-used, rail facilities, is well placed to move more freight by rail, and Railtrack's planned increase in route capacity approaching the port is a welcome step in the right direction.

I repeat that I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing the issues associated with the development of Dibden bay to the attention of the House. The subject raises some challenging issues for transport policy in general, as well as for the port. Those will undoubtedly get a thorough airing when a formal application has been made and the statutory procedures get under way. I am sure—

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 April 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

House Building (Worcestershire)

9.34 am

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): There is great concern in Worcestershire about the Government's refusal to reduce new house building targets for the county, and about the county council's insistence on building a new town of about 5,000 houses, in Wychavon district council in my constituency of Mid-Worcestershire.

The petition, from the parish councils of my constituency—Bretforton, Broadway, Charlton, Church Lench, Cropthorne, Drakes Broughton, Elmbridge, Elmley Lovett, Fladbury, Hartlebury, Honeybourne, Kington and Dormston, North Claines, North and Middle Littleton, Norton-juxta-Kempsey, Offenham, Peopleton, Pinvin, Salwarpe, South Littleton, Stock and Bradley, Tibberton, Upton Snodsbury, Whittington and Wyre Piddle—contains some 500 signatures and reads:

The petition of the residents of Mid Worcestershire declares that we are concerned about the proposals to allow significant new housing in our countryside.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that more homes are built on brown land in urban areas, instead of on undeveloped countryside, to breathe new life into our cities and towns and to protect the Worcestershire countryside for future generations.

To lie upon the Table.

Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I know that many Bills are waiting to be debated this morning, and that several hon. Members—for diverse reasons—want to speak, so I do not intend to be long. I can afford to be brief, because the Bill enjoyed detailed consideration on Second Reading and in Committee, and reasonably detailed consideration on Report.

Before saying a word about the Bill, I thank all those who have ensured that it has come thus far—to the threshold of completing its progress in the House. First, I reiterate my thanks to the Minister for Transport in London, very ably assisted by her officials. She has been an active supporter of the road traffic reduction campaign, and has been keen to find a way of ensuring that the Bill could be enacted. I am grateful for her co-operation.

Secondly, I thank the host of hon. Members in all parties who have supported and attended—some are attending today—to ensure that there were no hiccups on the way, and especially those who gave up several hours of their time to attend the Committee. The support from senior members of all parties has been much appreciated.

I also thank those who have had reservations about the Bill, but who have nevertheless not blocked its passage; I trust that their forbearance will continue today. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) has had reservations, but after expressing them in considerable detail and obtaining some useful amendments—clause 2(4) is the result of his amendment—he has allowed the Bill to proceed. He and I have had a few cross words, but I believe that neither of us is the worse for it, and I am grateful for his tolerance, if not his ungrudging assent to the Bill's passage.

The main thanks, however, must go to the very many people who have campaigned for this important Bill, in a variety of ways. I hope that the Government will not accuse me of plagiarism if I claim—and do so before they do—that this is a people's Bill.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Oh, no.

Mr. Dafis: I am sorry about that. I thought that it was worth trying to get it in.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Would the hon. Gentleman share with the House the Welsh for "the people's Bill"?

Mr. Dafis: "Mesur y bobl" would be the phrase that we would use. I am sure the House will recognise that the word "bobl" comes from the same root as "people".

The rest of what I have to say can be presented briefly as if in reply to three questions. Why should we reduce road traffic? By how much should it be reduced? How can it be reduced? First, why? We have been through all that, but I reiterate that the Bill, if implemented, will save significant numbers of lives, including the lives of young children, among whom road accidents are one of the main

[Mr. Dafis]

causes of death. That is a striking and serious statistic. It will significantly reduce ill health; again, particularly among children, as the evidence from Great Ormond Street hospital demonstrated.

Incidentally, by saving in those two areas, the Bill will save significant sums of money. The measure will improve the quality of social life, which is seriously disrupted—in ways that we cannot always measure—by heavy traffic. It is an environmental imperative to reduce road traffic. That can be done without causing economic damage—indeed, it can be done in a way that brings significant economic benefit and creates significant numbers of jobs.

Secondly, by how much should road traffic be reduced? That is important, because the Bill does not contain targets. The Bill, as originally drafted, proposed a reduction of 10 per cent. on 1990 levels by 2010, and an interim target of a 5 per cent. reduction halfway through that period. That is a challenge, but, as Professor John Whitelegg has demonstrated and as other transport experts are willing to show, it can be done. However, the process must begin soon. That is an important message for the Government. The Deputy Prime Minister has acknowledged it, and he has stated that he intends to have "more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car" by June 2003.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman and I agree strongly on this matter, and we agree also that it is easy to have fine words. Everybody would like to see congestion and emissions reduced. Does he agree that, if we wish to see action, we must set targets, as we have done on so many other issues?

Mr. Dafis: Targets are an essential element in achieving change in environmental policy—there is no doubt about that. The issue that has been considered is whether targets should be included in the Bill. Targets will emerge as a consequence of the strategies that the Bill will engender.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The hon. Gentleman is referring to clause 2 and targets, but it is unclear whether the Secretary of State is to publish and report targets that contain within them an element of local targeting. There is a deficiency in the Bill, which would allow the Secretary of State to publish bland figures for the whole of the UK—whatever that may be in the near future. However, the targets will have no effect whatever, because the traffic in the hon. Gentleman's part of the country may be entirely different from that in the Minister's constituency, for example. Does he envisage the Bill encouraging the Secretary of State to localise targets?

Mr. Dafis: The hon. and learned Gentleman may not know enough about current legislation. Following the willingness of the previous Government to respond, road traffic reduction legislation applies to local authorities, and requires authorities to set targets. This Bill is called the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill—in this case, "National" applies to Wales, Scotland and England.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): And Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dafis: Yes, although that is through a different mechanism. We have the strategic framework for delivering road traffic reduction locally, but the point of the Bill was to place that within an overall framework.

I was referring to the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister is on record as saying that targets are important in this field, and that he wishes to see significant reductions in car journeys by June 2003. It is worth mentioning that a 10 per cent. reduction is, in all probability, necessary to enable the Government to meet their other important target—the 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. I was pleased that the Government announced that they were to stick to that target, as announced by the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry during the debate on energy policy on Wednesday. If we are serious about the matter, we need a significant reduction of about 10 per cent.

My third question was, how can we achieve that reduction? John Whitelegg is one of a number of people who have shown that it can be achieved, and he has described the measures that can be used. He has said that a vast choice of measures could be adopted to achieve the 10 per cent. reduction, many of which are already in use. We are not seeking to reinvent the wheel—we are talking about using tried and tested methods. The methods that John Whitelegg suggests include: land use and planning policies; parking policies; bus promotion policies; travelcards; cycle facilities; and traffic management.

On freight, Professor Whitelegg has mentioned city logistics policies, which amount to the co-ordinating of the movement of goods to retail centres within towns. That policy has brought about significant reductions in some European countries. The use of new technology in dynamic scheduling and vehicle routing could enable freight to be delivered more efficiently and over fewer miles, by providing the necessary information. Professor Whitelegg emphasised that that can be achieved without significant increases in fuel prices, although he advocates such increases.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in real life, the only mechanism that will work is the price mechanism?

Mr. Dafis: I am afraid that I have to disagree. Nobody would deny that price influences people's behaviour. However, it would be dangerous to imagine that the price mechanism alone will deliver the results that we are seeking. Environmental groups have argued forcibly that, if we tried that, the social consequences and the public reaction would be negative, and we would not achieve the right outcome. Other, positive measures, such as investment, are needed. John Whitelegg has stated clearly that he believes that reductions can be achieved without increasing fuel prices, if the political will and a willingness to create the strategies exist.

I mentioned the three questions, and I have responded briefly to them. I wish to refer now to clause 2(2). Some have argued that clause 2(2) fatally weakens the Bill, by making provision for the Secretary of State not to have to set traffic reduction targets in certain circumstances. To be honest, I should prefer it if subsection (2) were not in the Bill. However, it is a concession that had to be made in order to obtain Government support. I understand why the Government wanted it in the Bill. I do not accept that it fatally weakens the Bill.

As the title of the Bill states, its purpose is to reduce road traffic. If, following its passage, the Government failed to set targets for road traffic reduction, they would fail to implement the purport of the Bill, if not the letter of it. I do not think that the Government would want to be guilty of that.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The hon. Gentleman says that the Bill would not be fatally flawed by the inclusion of clause 2(2) in its present form, but does he agree that clause 2(2) enables the Government to get off the hook of having to produce any targets whatever? If the Government in their absolute discretion think that other measures are appropriate, they can just use other measures. Will the hon. Gentleman try to move an amendment in the other place to ensure that the Bill achieves the purpose of requiring the Government to impose targets?

Mr. Dafis: That was a useful intervention. Of course, I cannot move an amendment in the other place, although I could encourage someone to do so. Perhaps the Government will consider an amendment at this late stage, even though the draft has been agreed. The hon. Gentleman seems to suggest inserting the word "and" instead of "or" in line 13, so that the subsection would read:

"other targets, and other measures"

instead of

"other targets, or other measures".

That is an interesting idea. If the Minister would consider it and respond positively, I should be very pleased.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman is saying, in effect, that the Bill is completely useless as a measure of compulsion. If the Government ignore it, there may merely be a degree of moral opprobrium on them for doing so. Would there not have been more moral pressure on the Government if, when the Minister wrote to the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government would not oppose Second Reading provided that he agreed to a number of detailed amendments, he had told her what she could do with that idea? Would not that have exerted moral pressure? Instead, he has given her a cover story.

Mr. Dafis: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, but I am not moved to agree with him. I do not intend to announce at this stage, on Third Reading, that the Bill is a useless exercise. It is an extremely useful exercise and it is important because it requires the Government to set targets, except in certain circumstances, which I shall deal with next. The impetus for the Bill has come from broad grass-roots support.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Having signed up to the Kyoto agreement for CO_2 reduction, the Government will have to specify the areas in which reductions will be made to achieve those targets. One of the key areas is emissions from cars. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government will have to set and publish their reduction targets?

Mr. Dafis: I could not agree more. There is no doubt that road traffic reduction is crucial if the Government are to achieve their Kyoto target and their own voluntary target, which is much more ambitious. The Government will have to set targets, and the Bill provides a useful framework.

The Secretary of State would be released from the duty to set targets for road traffic reduction only if he or she could demonstrate clearly that other targets or other measures could better achieve that. The phrase used in the Bill is:

"more appropriate for the purpose of reducing".

The Secretary of State would have to show that other measures were better for reducing the adverse impact of road traffic than the reduction of traffic itself. Those are the precise circumstances in which the Secretary of State would be released from that duty.

I do not believe that it could be demonstrated that other measures were more appropriate, bearing in mind the criteria listed in subsection (3). I do not think that they could be met or that the adverse effect of road traffic could be reduced without reducing road traffic. I do not believe that any Secretary of State could show that that could be done in any other way. In my view, meeting those important criteria involves reducing road traffic.

The adverse effects of road traffic listed in subsection (3) are: the emission of gases that contribute to climate change; the effects on air quality; the effects on health; traffic congestion; the effects on land and biodiversity; the danger to other road users; and social impacts. If those effects could be reduced in any other way, which I do not believe, it would be an extremely important achievement, and the enactment of the Bill would be amply justified.

I am proud to have been associated with the Bill. For the last time, I commend it to the House.

9.55 am

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): This is an appropriate time for the Third Reading of the Bill. As some hon. Members may have heard this morning, in the United Kingdom the incidence of asthma among children is the highest in the world. Although pollution is not necessarily the cause of asthma, it is accepted as the trigger for asthma.

I shall restrict my comments to clause 2. I regret that the Bill has no teeth. The targets have been extracted. A 10 per cent. target in the Bill—the same target as has been agreed for local authorities—could have been the Government's first step towards the 20 per cent. CO_2 reduction target to which they are committed, as they have recently restated.

The Government's actions to date in relation to road traffic reduction and the reduction of CO_2 emissions are disappointing. The Deputy Prime Minister recently announced an extra £500 million for public transport. I understand from a letter that I received from the Library that that £500 million is in fact £475 million. The figure was rounded up to £500 million. It is a novel approach to accounting that, for the purpose of an announcement, the figure was rounded up by £25 million to make it sound larger.

We read in the press today that Ministers and officials who are going to the green transport conference—where, among other things, green cars will be on show—are to

[Mr. Tom Brake]

be ferried there in 60 limousines. They will not catch the train from Manchester to Crewe because apparently the station in Crewe is in such a dilapidated state that the Government are scared to show it to foreign Ministers and officials, so they will travel in 60 limousines, none of which is gas-powered—they are all standard, petrol-driven limousines.

The Government said that consideration would be given to one of the amendments that I tabled, together with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), which related to a statement that the Deputy Prime Minister made after 1 May, when he was already in power. He stated that if, at the end of this Parliament, traffic levels were not held at 1997 levels, he would have failed, and that he would be held to account. That is not reflected in the Bill.

I accept that the Bill shows that, in principle, the Government are committed to doing something about reducing road traffic. It is definitely an improvement on the attitude of the previous Government, whose enthusiasm for road building would have done Jeremy Clarkson proud.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman was not in the House during the previous Parliament, but I was. I assure him that the previous Government were similarly committed to doing something about road traffic. Sadly, commitments to acting to reduce road traffic do not always achieve results.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. On Third Reading, hon. Members should discuss what is in the Bill and not what previous Governments have attempted to do.

Mr. Brake: I shall draw my remarks to a close. The Liberal Democrats give the Bill a very cautious welcome, because we think that it is the first very small step towards achieving reductions in traffic and CO_2 emissions.

9.59 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) on bringing his Bill to Third Reading. He was correct to acknowledge the help that he has received from the Bill's supporters and from those who asked questions about the legislation's detail and approach. I take this opportunity to commend the Minister on the good humour that she has shown throughout most of the process. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). I regret one or two things that I said during our exchanges in Committee, and I hope that he will overlook them.

It is important to recognise that the Bill repeats at national level existing local authority provisions. Local authorities will have the greatest power to act to reduce road traffic because they are responsible for 96 per cent. of roads in this country. Central Government can assist not by saying that all the road traffic reduction targets will be achieved through their own actions, but by affecting the popular culture. People should not suppose that the road traffic reduction Bill, which provides an opportunity for the Government to introduce a strategy and publish targets, signals an end to all road building. Most of our constituents know that we must create more traffic canals that divert traffic away from residential, school and shopping areas.

We need a bypass in my constituency. We also need a roundabout on the A259, so that people can access the village of Ferring without having to travel an extra two or three miles because they cannot cross the dual carriageway. I am sure that hon. Members could repeat other similar examples. In my previous constituency of Eltham in south-east London, the building of the Rochester Way relief road prevented traffic from going through many rat runs and, to that extent, provided a more direct route.

I do not argue that that should be the main plank of our traffic reduction strategy. Although most people would like to see a reduction in road traffic, and many could, with some thought and rearrangement, have better lives by travelling less far, less often, they should not suppose that the Bill is anti anything: it is simply a means of trying to achieve a better life, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion pointed out.

Today is not the day to air particular niggles across the Chamber. I am not sure that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) acknowledged the fact that, regardless of what may happen at one Transport Ministers' conference in Crewe, the present Government are mildly interested in making arrangements themselves, as well as trying to invigilate the actions of others, that will lead to a better life. I believe that that is the only serious reason for entering political service.

I shall spell out the things that I believe the Bill will achieve when enacted. Ministers should be prepared to say when they have got some targets right and, upon reflection, some wrong. When I was a junior Minister at the Department of Transport, the then Secretary of State set targets for road casualty reduction. We were correct in the targets that we set for deaths and serious injuries, but we were wrong about our target for slight injuries—I shall not explore that point in detail now, as it is outside the scope of the Bill. The review process will help us to focus on what is achievable.

There is also the "how" question. The hon. Member for Ceredigion explained why it is sensible to have a strategy for reducing road traffic—which, in the main, involves reducing unnecessary road traffic. He did not talk a great deal about how that would be achieved—although he spent some time on how much could be achieved. I shall refer to the "how" question.

It is clear that we must examine journeys to school by teachers, pupils and parents in urban and semi-urban areas. I like the idea of the virtual bus: the child with the longest bearable walk to school is escorted by a parent, and other children join the walk along the way until there is a crocodile walking to school.

One of the biggest changes that I have seen in my 22 or 23 years in the House is that most teachers now drive to school. I do not believe that they needed to make that switch; I do not think that it has done much good. The same applies to journeys to work. Not everyone can change his or her job.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Has my hon. Friend observed the fact that many schools—certainly those in

my constituency—have special car parking areas for sixth formers because more pupils, as well as teachers, are driving to school?

Mr. Bottomley: It is not my intention to claim that a particular teacher or pupil should not drive to school. However, I believe that most teachers and many pupils and their parents should not become involved in regular driving runs. It is worth discussing how we can provide more people with better transport alternatives. In many cases, that will involve using two legs to walk or to cycle.

I refer to the issue of journeys to work. Not all people can change where they live, their jobs or their place of work—I shall not discuss teleworking in any detail. It is clear that people should consider their journey to work when deciding to live or work elsewhere. I have not the slightest idea why people are concerned about whether their new home is in council band C, D or E—which may make a difference of about £100 a year—when they are happy to spend £2,000 or £3,000 a year travelling to work by car or by public transport. That will have a far greater impact on their free time and their wallet or purse.

Mr. Forth: Perhaps such people have made their own judgment—which was freely taken—and are prepared to endure a lengthy journey to work, at the cost that my hon. Friend mentioned, so that their life style reflects their priorities. Do they not have that right?

Mr. Bottomley: I agree with my right hon. Friend completely, as I usually do. My point is that people may like to think about those issues. Before the Hayes bypass was built and the M25 was completed, I used to use the example of someone working at Heathrow who took 40 minutes to travel four miles to Heathrow from Hayes. Now that better roads and routes have been opened, that person takes 40 minutes to drive 40 miles. I leave people with that choice, as my right hon. Friend suggests. I shall not take too many more interventions, but I must give way to one of the well-known bicyclists in the Chamber.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course individuals must choose, but does he agree that Governments have a part to play in influencing their choice? Is not that what we are talking about in the Bill?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, but the Government's actions will be limited. The Bill does not urge people to change everything that they are doing: it simply tries to find a strategy that allows for some change. I shall make a comparison between road traffic reduction and road casualty reduction. It is worth remembering that the Government identified the issues and helped people to make decisions about matters that were causing them the greatest distress, handicap and disadvantage. The Government did not reduce drink driving by young men by two thirds in two years through the actions of policemen, prisons or courts: that result was achieved by allowing people to make their own decisions. That is the most important message that we can send.

Governments can make some difference. That point is made by the fact that visitors will be able to travel on the Jubilee line underground extension to the largest conference seen in this country, at the millennium exhibition site on the Greenwich peninsula. When the American Bar Association comes to this country in the summer of 2000, if its members decide that they want to go from central London to the millennium dome on the same morning, the Jubilee line extension will be able to cope with them all in an hour and a half. That would not be possible with a motorway. Some of what the Government engender will make a difference, but most of it will be through a slightly different pattern of decision making.

I do not want to put too much emphasis on reducing emissions. It is true that some of the things that have been put in hand, partly by regulation and partly by commercial self-interest, will lead quite quickly to a reduction in motor vehicle emissions—for example, fuel efficiency improvements.

I declare an interest as chairman of a medium-tech company that counts cars going into car parks. The changes to car parking enforcement in London and other cities mean that no longer are there people driving round Berkeley square for two or three hours trying to find a space on a yellow line. Without enforcement, all the yellow line spaces were taken up. When one enforces the yellow line rules, people start to look for parking meters. When one prices parking in such a way that there is always a space, people get to their space first time rather than having to drive round for 20 minutes or so. That is a minor example.

I hope that we shall not go for road pricing for urban congestion, or for motorways, although there are good arguments for both. If people want to see the reasons, they are in the Transport Select Committee's reports.

The most important issue is whether people can make choices that improve their lives. We should not go always for disincentives. We should look for incentives that contribute to a better life, not just for people in cities or towns but for those in rural areas.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Minister responsible for roads. In the rural areas that I represent, and in the surrounding suburban areas—for example, Bedford—improving the roads so that people may gain access—I hope, by public transport—is important. I hope that he will agree that the Bill is not anti-roads. Good bypasses and good new roads are very much part of what he and I and the House are trying to achieve.

Mr. Bottomley: One of my brothers-in-law, who runs a railway, says that we have to change our approach to some of the railways. In the old days, when people did not have private transport and most of them lived in inner-city areas, getting to a central railway station was easy. Nowadays, most people do not live in inner-city areas. They have to get to the railway station by some form of road transport, whether that is bus, taxi or car, and we shall have to contemplate parkway stations, so that people with cars can reach a place where they can get on a train without causing chaos in the inner-city area. Those arguments can be developed in greater depth on another occasion.

I finish on what I call the Milton Keynes mistake, which was a Government mistake, but not one of this or the previous Government's making. Milton Keynes should have been built using the original proposal for a figure-of-eight railway line linking up the villages. One

[Mr. Bottomley]

continuous railway line would have allowed everyone to get from the villages to the centre of Milton Keynes by public transport relatively simply.

Such a concept brings together public and private partnership in a way that provides advantages to all sorts of people. It allows the village to be the centre of a community, and the town centre to be the place of congregation and work, and of links to the rest of the world.

That was a planning issue spotted by the architect at the time, but it should have been carried through and duplicated—not imposed. Finding out the greatest advantage to the individual and the group, to my mind, sums up progressive conservatism.

10.13 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I received a larger postbag on this Bill than on many measures, and what was impressive was that many of the letters were individually written. Constituents sometimes feel that they have discharged their democratic responsibilities by scribbling an illegible signature at the bottom of a badly reproduced letter and sending it off to their Member of Parliament "demanding action", and think that it has made a valid contribution to the debate. I do not think that it does, and sometimes I have not endeared myself to my constituents by pointing that out. Whether that has anything to do with the fact that my majority is now 281 as opposed to 9,500 I do not know. Somebody once said that a coward dies a thousand deaths and a brave man dies but once. I have done it a few more times than that, but there we are.

There have been a great many letters. Some of them have obviously been orchestrated, but many have not, and that is quite impressive. The curious thing about it is that the letters that I have received quote the title of the Bill, but they are not talking about this Bill at all. What they are talking about is what they would like to see in a Bill called something like the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill. Sometimes, I have had to write back and say, "You're making a splendid case for a Bill, but I have to tell you that it is not the Bill before the House of Commons."

Mr. Forth: I am not asking my hon. Friend to divulge too many of the secrets of his postbag, but perhaps he would say what proportion of his electorate has taken the initiative to write to him to express their interest in the Bill. So that we can get some idea of the true concern among his constituents, given that he said that it is a large response of an unusual kind, can he give us some idea of the scale?

Mr. Nicholls: When I said that it was a large response, I meant large compared with other people who write to me about other issues. I have not totalled it. I think that it is probably into three figures. It is probably about 100 people. There is a school of thought—hon. Members sometimes take comfort from this if they have larger majorities than mine—that, if one gets 100 letters on an issue, it must mean that 74,900 people are not worried about it either way. Although that can be comforting, I am not so sure that it is true. Letter writing is a form of contribution to public life, if it is done well and is not just signing something that is pre-written.

In the same way that local political parties and local charities are run by a tiny number of people in any constituency, there is usually a great groundswell behind a campaign. One often says that behind a Conservative poster there is one vote and behind a Liberal poster there are 10. Although there may not be many actual letters, the matter does interest people. What troubles me is that, when they have written to me about the Bill, they have said that it will do things that it simply will not. People say that the Bill must be passed because, when it is, there will be substantial road traffic reductions.

In some ways, that is quite chilling because, by and large, the people who have written live in the three main towns in my constituency. They are not writing from Dartmoor. They are not writing from a rural location where, if they were not able to drive, it would be quite impossible for them to get in and out of a town to buy things. In a stern and sometimes condescending attitude, people will write that others are making unnecessary journeys. We all know the definition of an unnecessary journey: a journey that somebody else makes that we would not need to make ourselves.

We also know that road traffic reduction targets are all very well but, as a perk of one's ministerial job—I do not criticise the Minister for this, as I thoroughly enjoyed it—one has a ministerial car. I suppose that some members of the present Government are so genuinely caught up on their own convictions that they are putting in applications for ministerial bicycles, with baskets in the front for their red boxes, but by and large they are going around in ministerial cars. I find it remarkable when people write to me to say, "It's got to be done, as people are making unnecessary journeys," and when people unrealistically think that the taxpayer could or should provide a system of public transport that is so comprehensive that it could replace the service that people have to provide for themselves in their own village.

At times, I write back and say, "Hang on a second"—because I will live dangerously—"I disagree with what you want. I think you are simply wrong. I have to tell you that this Bill is not it." I usually get letters back to tell me that I have not read the Bill properly. It does not take long to read this Bill, and I shall come back to that point in a moment. I sometimes write back and ask which part of the Bill will reduce road traffic. So far, I have not received a single reply to that, for two reasons. Either people simply do not know—that will be most—or some will have taken the trouble to go down to the public library and read the Bill, which will not take them long.

One of the refreshing features of the Bill is that it can probably be understood on first reading. It might be necessary, however, to read it twice, for a reason to which I shall refer. That having been done, the reader can understand it. Anyone who goes to a public library thinking, "I'm going to persuade my Member of Parliament to vote for the Bill on Second Reading because it will bring about major road traffic reductions in my area," will be disappointed when he comes to read it.

When the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) spoke in favour of the motion that the Bill be read the Third time—I hope that he will not mind me saying that I think he did it extremely well—he set out a case for a Bill that is not before the House. I jotted down some of the things that the hon. Gentleman said. If it was in order

for him to make such remarks, even though they might not have related directly to the Bill, it must be in order for me to refer to them in passing.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill will save lives, improve health and reduce road traffic. I am sure that there is such a Bill out there somewhere, ready to be written. I could even have a go at preparing such a measure now. I could share with the House, if it were in order to do so—I accept that it would not—what that Bill might be. I can assure the House, however, that it would not be the Bill that is before us. This Bill will do none of the things that the hon. Gentleman claims it will, to which I have referred. Instead, the Bill is about aspirations. It is an attempt to refer obliquely to the Bill that might have been, but will not be.

I do not criticise the hon. Member for Ceredigion, because we have all in our time been in a position when we have believed passionately in something. For all I know—I do not know him particularly well—when the hon. Gentleman came into politics the one thing that he wanted to do was introduce and take through the House a Bill that would bring about a reduction in road traffic. I may think that that is unrealistic, but that objective may have mattered to him passionately.

As a result, the hon. Gentleman drafts the Bill. He starts the process with which we are all familiar when we initiate private Bills. He needs to know, of course, whether he will receive Government support, and finds that he will not. However, I have a rather high regard for the Under-Secretary. She has dealt with a number of my constituency cases extremely briskly instead of merely shuffling trays around. I have high hopes of her, in due course, when it comes to the Kingskerswell bypass. That means that I shall restrain myself and not go through in any detail—others may not have the same restraint—the hon. Lady's position on those matters before she became a Minister and her present position. However, I am not sure that the facts have changed. Perhaps it is simply that the style of motor transport has changed.

It is quite significant that there was an exchange of correspondence between the hon. Member for Ceredigion and the Minister which was referred to in a Press Association news bulletin. I assume that the reference is correct. The hon. Gentleman apparently sent a letter to the Minister, to which she replied as follows:

"The Government will not oppose a Second Reading, subject to your agreeing in the debate to address a number of detailed reservations."

There is something about the way that civil servants help to draft ministerial responses that I always love, even though they helped me to do it.

What were the reservations? We shall hear about them in due course. What was the effect of that process? It was that the hon. Gentleman, if he wished to get his Bill through the House, would have to propose some pretty radical amendments to it. The issue arose in the context of a meeting that the Minister was invited to attend in her constituency. Anyone who has been a Minister will savour her response. When writing to explain why she would not attend the meeting organised by Friends of the Earth—this is marvellous—she said:

"I regret that I am not able to accept your invitation."

It gets better when she writes:

"I am sorry that this will be a disappointing reply but I understand that the Bill will not be published before the beginning of January and until I know the provisions of the Bill, it is simply not possible for me to explain what my position on the Bill will be."

We are all politicians, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You used to be before you moved to a higher plane. What politician is not prepared to express a view on a Bill that he or she has never seen? We do it all the time. For us lowly people on the Back Benches, that is all we can do. However, the Minister is in a better position than that. She can write not only her own Bills but private Members' Bills. Although the hon. Lady may not have known the contents of the Bill, she could have written, "I'll tell you what, I am like other politicians in that I never pass judgment on a Bill that I have not seen, but I will"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is humorously discussing interesting matters. I am not so interested in what the Minister could do as in what the hon. Gentleman can do, and that is to keep within the terms of a Third Reading debate. What is done is done, and what is won is won. The Bill's Third Reading is before us. What the Minister did or failed to do has nothing to do with me.

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You enable me to move straight into the Bill and to say what the Minister did. It is obvious that she will not oppose the Bill today in the light of what happened at an earlier stage.

Perhaps the best bit of the Bill reads:

"Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty".

That is rather a nice phrase. The reader then thinks that he will move on to something rather better. There is the obligation in the Bill that is to be found in clause 2, which reads:

"It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State, subject to subsection (2) and with the aim of reducing the adverse environmental"

and all that. The aim behind the Bill is set out. That is marvellous and that is the bit that the hon. Member for Ceredigion wanted. However, subsection (2) states that the

"Secretary of State is not obliged to comply with the requirements of subsection (1)".

The first subsection imposes an obligation and the second one states that the Secretary of State does not have to comply with it.

We have heard talk—perhaps we may hear more today—about Henry VIII clauses. Subsection (2) is more a Ghengis Khan clause. It reads:

"The Secretary of State is not obliged to comply with the requirement of subsection (1) if he considers that other targets, or other measures"—

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I think that my hon. Friend has erred. Is it not the Ethelred the Unready clause?

Mr. Nicholls: It may be. I prefer Ghengis Khan because of the brutal nature of the clause. I suspect that Ethelred the Unready was a deeply misunderstood social democrat of his day. The clause is much worse than my right hon. and learned Friend suggests. It states that the Secretary of State does not have to do anything if he considers that other targets or other measures are more appropriate—

Mr. Robathan: Machiavellian.

Mr. Nicholls: It is not even Machiavellian. It is absolutely Ghengis Khan. The clause does not state that

[Mr. Nicholls]

the Secretary of State's judgment has to be submitted to Parliament. Instead, it provides the merest fig leaf. Only a moron in a hurry would think that the fig leaf will work. The clause tells us that, if the Secretary of State decides to take action,

"he shall publish a report explaining his reasoning and including an assessment of the impact of the other targets or other measures on road traffic reduction."

That is it.

The Bill continues and mentions one or two other things. It comes to a brief end after about another half a page. That is it: there is no obligation on the Minister to comply with the requirements of the Bill. To describe the Bill as flaccid would suggest a degree of rigidity that would be completely inappropriate. The one tiny and pathetic subsection that might conceivably do some good—it certainly could not do any harm—is neutered in the next subsection by allowing all discretion to rest with the Minister.

I came along to the House today notwithstanding the fact that my constituents' concerns are not reflected in the Bill. I have been in politics long enough to know that, if I write to people to the effect, "This Bill is not what you think it is and therefore it should be opposed," they will not understand.

The Bill can be summed up in one quaint old phrase: like the chambermaid's baby, it is only a small one. The Bill will not do very much harm. I suppose the worst feature is the number of trees that have been slaughtered to produce the wood pulp to enable it, and other documentation, to be printed. It will not do much harm, but let nobody think that it will do the slightest bit of good.

10.27 am

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): I shall speak briefly and a little more enthusiastically about the Bill than my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). I think that, strangely enough, there is in politics a place for exhortation, and that what the Bill does is exhort. I see my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) shaking his head. I think that there is some value in the exhortation is that is contained in the Bill and I therefore give it a gentle welcome.

I am pleased to see the qualifications in clause 2(3) that require the Secretary of State, before targets are published for road traffic reduction, to have regard to matters such as "congestion",

"danger to other road users",

"social impacts", "effects on air quality" and "effects on health". Those considerations are of crucial importance to roads issues in my constituency.

The Minister knows that I have spent a great deal of time banging on about the Great Barford bypass and the need for the Bedford western relief road, which are highly relevant to the Bill. The position would be eased if there were a 10 per cent. reduction in traffic, but even if theBill achieved that objective, there would still be a need for the bypasses for exactly the reasons that the Minister is rightly enjoined to consider "congestion",

"danger to other road users"

and "social impacts". The exhortation to consider the road traffic position in the round and in the context of an integrated transport policy, which is a grand way of saying that people should be able to find a bus or a train to get on after parking their cars, is valuable.

Mr. Dafis: Although I do not want to assist in spinning the debate out, I am grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's gentle support for the Bill, but he should not get away with claiming that it is only about exhortation. Clause 2(1) states:

"It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State",

which is a little more than exhortation. The duty can be suspended only in certain circumstances—I have mentioned clause 2(2)—but the fundamental is that a requirement would be placed on the Secretary of State, so the Bill is not only about exhortation.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I do not want to take away the hon. Gentleman's achievement, but he undervalues exhortation, which is a crucial part of politics. It is an aspect of leadership and gives people direction. He is perhaps closer to my point than he thinks. What would it be the Secretary of State's duty to do? There is a duty

"to set and publish in a report targets for road traffic reduction in England, Wales and Scotland."

The duty is not to reduce road traffic, but to set targets. People aim to achieve targets, and when we exhort people to do something, we suggest a direction in which they should go.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend rightly says that there is an important role in politics for exhortation and that politicians should give a lead where they think it appropriate. My difference with him is that I have grave doubts about whether legislation and law making form an appropriate vehicle through which to exhort or to give leadership. I am asking for his advice and will obviously defer to his judgment ultimately, but should not the role of the law be much more specific and much more firmly based for it to be effective? I have difficulty with legislating to exhort, not with the concept of exhortation.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I understand, and to a considerable extent sympathise with, my right hon. Friend's point, but, in a democratic country, messages need to be put across and we need to set a sense of direction. We should not be so grand and so restrictive about the purposes of legislation that we do not occasionally use it to exhort and to push Governments of all flavours in a particular direction, especially through private Members' Bills.

When we were in power, we were willing to be pushed on many of the issues to which the Bill rightly refers. We were making progress with, for example, the practical impacts in Bedfordshire of trying to improve the quality of people's lives and the safety of people in villages such as Great Barford by getting on with building bypasses. We were making big efforts, under the private finance initiative and through the introduction of private money for road building, in the large new housing estates that

will develop to the west of Bedford to achieve a Bedford western relief road. If the Bill will help with such matters—I hope that the Minister will say that it will—it will have a valuable effect in its exhortationary function.

10.33 am

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It pains me to disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), but the pain is offset by the pleasure of admitting that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said most of what I had intended to say. However, that will not stop me saying a little more to give him my complete support.

In making my notes about the Bill and when listening to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis), I picked out the headings that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge pursued, but I shall put a slightly different emphasis on them. A number of my reservations about the Bill are similar to his. One is that it is driven by a single-interest group. Such Bills are becoming more common. There is a burgeoning—some say that that is healthy in a democracy—of well-funded and well-organised interest groups, but they do not always represent a majority or a widely-based view.

I intervened on my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire to press him on how widespread the response to the Bill has been, generated as it has been by a single-interest group. Politicians should, as I did, measure the response by counting the number of spontaneous letters that they received from the electorate on the matter before the Bill arrived on the scene and before the single-interest group got to work. That is the acid test of how much the public are concerned.

I cannot speak for my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge, but over the past two or three weeks there has been a well organised phone-in campaign in my constituency about the Bill and, of late, about one or two others. I pay tribute to the extent to which Friends of the Earth has organised the telephone campaign by its supporters in my constituency. I have enjoyed some interesting conversations with my constituents on the matter, and I shall mention them later because they reflect my hon. Friend's remarks.

To date, 25 or 30 constituents have been in contact with me. No doubt Friends of the Earth has more paid-up members in Bromley and Chislehurst, but only those people contacted me to say how much they supported the Bill.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): How much correspondence does the right hon. Gentleman receive from constituents who are not members of pressure groups complaining about the impact of traffic congestion, noise, smell, vibration and pollution on their lives?

Mr. Forth: At a rough estimate—I should not like the hon. Gentleman to hold me to it too strictly—about one letter a month. My constituency is a busy and, happily, relatively affluent outer-London suburb that enjoys a lot of traffic. I should have thought that I would have received more of a response if the concern to which hon. Members have referred existed. To date, I have not had such a spontaneous response.

It is claimed that the genesis of such Bills reflects widespread public support, but I challenge that argument because I do not believe that they do. Politicians may be subjected to pressure through their postbag or through telephone calls, but it is our responsibility to make a judgment about the extent to which that reflects widespread genuine public concern.

Mr. Robathan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that orchestrated letter-writing or telephone campaigns can lead one to adopt a more sceptical position? Although 100 constituents out of 70,000 may have written, we should consider the other side of the issue more closely.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Any group that puts pressure on Members of Parliament must make a careful judgment about the nature of that pressure and its likely effect.

In my discussions with constituents who made telephone calls at the prompting of the interest group behind the Bill, I took the trouble, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge, to ask—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the right hon. Gentleman to dwell on his constituency contacts or on a campaign, because, as I have said, we are past that stage. The House has decided on the Bill's earlier stages, and we are now on Third Reading.

Mr. Forth: That allows me to go into the point that I was making. I asked my constituents how they thought that the Bill would lead to the reduction in traffic on which they were so keen. That was not an unreasonable question. I said, "You have taken the trouble to call me to say how much you support the Bill's aims as set out in its short title." It was not unreasonable to ask them, "What sort of reductions do you envisage as a result of the Bill?" We often got into interesting conversations about whether the traffic that is generated by parents who are taking their children to school would be reduced. My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) mentioned that. Some people said yes, but others were not so keen.

We are familiar with the list of categories such as families going to the supermarket to do their weekly shopping, people visiting relatives and elderly people who feel more secure in their cars than they do on public transport or in walking. Many kinds of traffic arise from family and personal circumstances and one must ask, "Which type of journey do we envisage being reduced perhaps not as a result of the Bill, but to reach the targets that the Government will eventually set?"

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge spoke about aspirations, a word that I have in my notes. My hon. Friend got there before me. The problem with Bills such as this one is that it is easy for them to result in aspirations or to exhort through legislation. However, if we have no clear idea of how to achieve results, we are being irresponsible. It is the duty of those who support such legislation to have a clear idea, even if it is not expressed, of exactly what traffic they envisage will be reduced, the effect on people's lives, and the cost implications. I hope that the Minister will deal with those matters in detail.

Mr. Dafis: The report by John Whitelegg goes through the categories of traffic and describes by how much

[Mr. Dafis]

specific types can be reduced and by what means. The right hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that the Bill is driven by a single interest group. It is supported by a broad range of organisations and many local authorities. A MORI poll that was published just before Second Reading showed that 79 per cent. of people wanted road traffic to be reduced. The Bill responds to a popular demand.

Mr. Forth: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has made that point because I am prepared to do a deal with him. If he is prepared to proceed with legislation on the basis of opinion polls and support, I shall trade my support for the Bill for his support for the restoration of capital punishment. As he knows, time and again people give their overwhelming support to proposals for the restoration of capital punishment. I am prepared to discuss with the hon. Gentleman the interesting notion of legislating by opinion poll, but, if we take that route, the hon. Gentleman must not be too selective.

I shall not pursue that line, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you might not approve of it. Legislating by such means is rather dubious. To say that many organisations want such measures is not conclusive or definitive. We have a responsibility to think about what real people in their ordinary lives think. Organisations have agendas, to which they are legitimately entitled.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Bill places on the Minister responsibilities and duties to set a strategy and road traffic reduction targets. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be fine if people chose to travel fewer miles because that made their lives better? Is it by choice that we have the lowest homicide rate in the European Union?

Mr. Forth: Indeed. If we could find a way to combine freedom of choice with the Bill's aims, that would be ideal, but that is not the way that the case has been put. We are told that the Government will make a necessarily arbitrary decision about how much they think road traffic should be reduced and that, by some mysterious process which we do not yet fully understand, although the hon. Member for Ceredigion has an expert in whom he has touching faith, all the problems will be solved.

In his speech, to which we all listened carefully, the hon. Member for Ceredigion did not give an exhaustive list. That is a pity, because such a list would have been relevant. However, he mentioned parking, bus promotion, the use of bicycles, and traffic management. I agree that it is perfectly reasonable to charge for parking facilities. I belong to the school of thought that prefers the pricing approach. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West said, that would enable people to choose, which is what we expect them to do over cigarettes and car use. The Government continually increase the price of petrol.

People are given the message that the Government of the day think that consumers should base their judgments and priorities on cost. I have no difficulty with that concept, but it is not the same as bus promotion, which sounds good when it is said quickly, but I suspect means little.

Mr. Paterson: On the issue of pricing, does my hon. Friend agree that sticking excess duty on fuel is a crude, blunderbuss approach and not a reflection of the market? There are other ways to get closer to people's travel choices, but the blanket imposition of fuel duty hits everybody.

Mr. Forth: In my haste to be brief, I am in danger of glossing over such matters. My hon. Friend rightly stops me on the point that, although I support a pricing approach, I agree that the universal imposition of tax on products such as petrol ignores the complexity of the market and of the structure of transport with which the Bill aspires to deal. For example, there are differences between my hon. Friend's constituency and mine. Mine is urban or suburban, while his is much more rural, and that gives rise to different traffic reduction requirements. In the context of the Bill's aspirations, how far do we think that the measures that are likely to flow from it, if any, will make the distinction that my hon. Friend reasonably seeks? Will there be a much more sophisticated approach, using the pricing mechanism, to acknowledge the difference in the type of traffic geographically and by social groups? I shall not labour the point, but I agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful to him for his intervention.

Bus promotion encounters the great difficulty that arises when people look to public transport, broadly and loosely defined, as the answer to most of the problems. The difference in nature between journeys that are undertaken in cars and those that people are able to undertake by public transport is so complete that the public transport solution probably has only limited applicability to reducing overall traffic.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: When my right hon. Friend intervened during my speech, he rightly said that we in the Conservative party can think about more than one topic. Perhaps he would focus on clause 2(2), which states that the Secretary of State is not obliged to comply with certain requirements if he

"considers that other targets, or other measures, are more appropriate for the purpose of reducing the adverse impacts of road traffic".

Does that not encourage the Minister to do what I am sure my right hon. Friend would wish to be done when we wend our way through Chislehurst, and I would wish to be done when I see the increasing congestion and accidents in Great Barford and to the west of Bedford, and to build decent roads when they are needed as part of the response to the Bill?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. That is an interesting point. As he is well aware, one school of thought is that, the more roads we build, the more traffic we encourage, and I am intrigued that, in expressing his broad support for the Bill, he should almost in the same breath make a plea for a bypass. People whose views on this matter are much more sophisticated than mine argue that the M25 is a classic example of something that was designed to ease traffic and has done the opposite. We have to resolve that question clearly before we go much further.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion, the Bill's promoter, cited buses as one of the things that his pet expert, in whom he has obviously touching faith, had suggested to make progress and to solve the problem. No matter how many buses we produce and how sophisticated and pollution-free they may be, I cannot for the life of me see

how they are going to replace the vast majority of those journeys that are undertaken by the citizenry in their cars for personal, family or private purposes.

Let us look more specifically at that, and take the vexed question of children's journeys to school. One of the arguments of the hon. Member for Ceredigion was that the Bill would save lives. He then mentioned children's lives. I wondered about that when he said it because it occurred to me that there is at least a possibility—I shall put it no higher than that—that, if we were to lure or force children out of their parents' cars and have them take the bus or walk, as schoolchildren did when someone of my generation was at school, or even my own children did, there is at least a possibility that the accident rate among school-age children might increase, not decrease.

Mr. Robathan: My right hon. Friend makes an entirely fair point, because, if all children were to walk or bicycle, particularly, to school, the chances are that there would be greater casualties. However, he must go one step further and ask: whose fault would that be? Would it be the fault of the child walking or bicycling, or of the motorist going too fast and driving too badly?

Mr. Forth *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot go as wide as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is going. There are items in the Bill, and it is up to him to speak to those and not go beyond the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Forth: I am, as ever, grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was perhaps making the mistake of picking up the points that the hon. Member for Ceredigion had made in his speech. I thought that that was what debate was supposed to be about, but perhaps the modernisation of the House has hit that on the head, along with so many other excellent traditions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that, if the right hon. Gentleman were the promoter of the Bill, he would be given some leeway, but we have gone beyond that and I am going to be very firm. It is nothing to do with the modernisation of the House. It is to do with the rules of the House, which are that, on Third Reading, comments must relate to what we have before us—and that is the Bill.

Mr. Forth: God forbid that I should ever be the promoter of a Bill, but perhaps my time will come. Then other colleagues will be able to have much fun at my expense, but I hope that that is a long way off.

I do not want to prolong the debate unnecessarily, but I did want to put the few views that I have expressed on the record, if only so that, if any more of my constituents telephone me, I can send them the extract from *Hansard* to show them what I have to say, rather than take the trouble of writing lengthy letters of explanation. As colleagues will be aware, *Hansard* is extremely useful in that regard. More important, I wanted the hon. Member for Ceredigion to understand the extent of my reservations about the Bill, although I am sure that it will proceed in a gentle and orderly fashion to its next stage in the legislative process.

I have no desire necessarily to stop that process, but we should all be aware that there is a danger that the expectations that are raised by such Bills and by those who promote them are in themselves dangerous. There is always a probability of disillusionment with the legislative process if we raise hopes too much with such Bills and then find that we are unable to deliver. That, I hope, will not be the case, although I fear that, with this Bill, it is extremely probable.

10.54 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on Third Reading, to welcome the Bill and to welcome the endeavours of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) in bringing it before the House. I do not share the scepticism of some of my hon. Friends—not because I do not appreciate their view that there is a measure of exhortation, as opposed to substance, in the Bill, but because I believe that it is going in the right direction. Let me explain why.

First, although there will be general approval throughout the House, and, indeed, among large percentages of people in opinion polls, for the concept that road traffic should be reduced, the reality is very different, as I know from my constituency. My constituency has three motorways going through it and faces the threat of motorway widening and of motorway service areas being built, usually in deciduous woodland that will be gutted or blown like an egg so that no more than the fringes around it are preserved.

In my constituency, there is much opposition to road traffic, and much concern about the way in which it reduces the quality of life. However, I also have to accept the fact that I represent a constituency—indeed, I have my own car on the edge of the constituency—where car ownership is the highest in the UK. When representative polling samples are taken in the constituency and people are asked their primary local concern, they answer, "Free car parking places." I must accept that, in those circumstances, my constituents are sending a double message.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Double standards.

Mr. Grieve: No, not double standards. My constituents genuinely wish their quality of life to improve—in relation to traffic, exhaust emissions and the like—but, at the same time, they share the problem faced by people throughout this country: the motor car remains the only means by which they can get from the place where they start their journey to the place where they intend to finish it. Most of the alternatives start from a place where they do not intend to start and finish at a place where they do not intend to finish. Until that issue is dealt with, or until there is a change in culture, we shall not make progress.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and I—I am sorry that he has just left the Chamber, but he has already sat through quite a lot of peroration from hon. Members, so I will forgive him that—have the privilege and pleasure of serving on the Environmental Audit Committee. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would agree with me about what has emerged during our deliberations over the months. Leaving aside my constituency, there is an enormous gulf between the revivalist aspirations

[Mr. Grieve]

represented by Ministers coming before the Committee and the environmental improvements that they wish to achieve, and the reality; and structures that may enable us to deal with that reality have not been set up.

Although it has been said that the Bill has been gutted by Government intervention, it appears that two key matters remain in the Bill. The first is the duty on the Secretary of State to publish and report road traffic reduction targets, and the second is that, even if he can wriggle off that hook so that he does not have to comply with the requirements, he will have to explain why, and publish that explanation.

Because of that, I—and, I should like to think, the hon. Member for Ceredigion—have a fertile area for further questioning on the Select Committee. We have a number of opportunities to question the revivalist approach—more characteristic of a Welsh chapel than anything else—that appears to animate some Ministers as they explain to us the wonderful new world that we are about to enter, and to introduce a little more hard reality. Even if the Bill achieves that purpose alone, it will still be worth while.

Road traffic reduction is a highly desirable goal, but it is also extremely difficult to achieve. One should not hazard oneself to prophesy, but when the reports are published in the next few years I should be surprised to find anything other than clear evidence that road traffic reduction targets are not being met and that road traffic is increasing. That is the grim reality.

Mr. Green: What is the use of targets if there are no penalties for failing to meet them? If the targets have to be met by the Secretary of State, it is inconceivable that any Government would allow legislation that would impose meaningful penalties on him. If there are no penalties, how useful are the targets?

Mr. Grieve: I accept that targets of themselves will not necessarily lead to a beneficial result. However, they will at least oblige the Secretary of State to set out what he believes to be achievable and, subsequently, to come before the House or the Select Committee to explain why he has not been able to meet them. He will then have to face the reality of why the targets are difficult to meet. To be more optimistic, the Secretary of State could come before the House or the Committee to say how, by some great and wonderful miracle, the targets have been achieved or are near to being achieved. That is desirable—

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Surely the issue is not whether the Secretary of State personally suffers some penalty if the targets are not met, but whether we can achieve an overall general improvement in the quality of life. Tens of thousands of people make a certain decision on 300-odd days of the year. Surely we should be trying to achieve a framework that will spot the things that matter, and not concentrate on the unimportant.

The Bill raises several issues on which the Minister could help to focus attention. No one expects the Minister to issue regulations—which could not be done under this Bill anyway—saying, "Thou shalt", or "Thou shalt not."

Mr. Grieve: I agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I was about to make precisely those points. He has outlined exactly what the Bill will achieve and the benefit that will flow from it. The fact that the Bill's aim is modest does not detract from the fact that it is an essential building block in promoting the beneficial results that we want to achieve.

We have a long haul ahead of us. As I said earlier, Ministers come to the House and express themselves in revivalist terms in general, but never provide details of substance. It is time that we and they woke up to the fact that the issues of environmental improvement generally and road traffic reduction in particular are difficult. The Bill takes a small step in that direction. It will allow for greater scrutiny, which in turn will allow for greater public debate. That will allow for the changes in culture that we hope will enable people to take a different view of the use of their cars and become more inventive and creative about the use of alternatives.

On that basis, I am happy to support the Bill, and join my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Ceredigion in commending it to the House.

11.3 am

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House, for being today's miscreant in the mobile phone stakes. I would not like to be the hon. Member who, during Welsh questions on Monday, fled before Madam Speaker could identify him as that day's miscreant. It behoves those of us who pass laws to own up when we break the laws of the House.

The range of views expressed on the Bill this morning have been interesting—from a gentle welcome to severe reservations. That is a sensible range of responses. I assure the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) that I am at the gentle welcome end of the spectrum. To be honest, I do not think that the Bill will do a tremendous amount of good in achieving road traffic reductions, but it will do no harm. Indeed, some small amount of good may come from raising the issue in the public consciousness and putting a measure on the statute book that imposes continuous obligations on successive Secretaries of State to think about the issue.

The Bill has been improved as it has passed through its various stages, and may be improved yet further. Some of the improvements have been due to some of the Minister's more spectacular retreats. I look forward, with more than my usual eager anticipation, to her speech at the end of the debate. I am sure that she has prepared an enormous number of supportive remarks about the importance of road traffic reduction. It will be entertaining to see how she squares that with the fact that the Government have pulled many of the teeth out of the Bill, both during its various stages and following negotiations with the hon. Member for Ceredigion. In fact, I support the Minister, as I think that she has done the right thing.

The Bill imposes a responsibility on the Secretary of State. The House might find it useful to consider how, in practice, national targets would be implemented. As several hon. Members have said, there is a similar measure already on the statute book. It imposes similar responsibilities on local authorities for assessment and consideration of traffic issues. Obviously, local authorities can fulfil their responsibilities in a detailed way, while being sensitive to local conditions. This Bill is a much more ambitious attempt at traffic reduction because it sets national targets for England, Scotland and Wales. The danger is that they will be vacuous.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has already said that we should draw a distinction between traffic problems in different parts of the country. What are perceived to be the main traffic problems in urban areas—usually congestion and pollution—are entirely different from those in rural areas, which often boil down to heavy lorries on unsuitable country roads and a lack of adequate public transport.

My constituency is more or less 50:50 urban and rural, so my constituents, depending on where they live, suffer from all those problems. The danger of national targets is that, unless the Secretary of State wills it, he will not be able to fine-tune the targets. I hope that the Minister can assure us that the targets set out in clause 2 will not be imposed flatly, but that the Secretary of State will provide a more sophisticated response.

Given the right hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for regionalism, which I do not share, I have no doubt that he will be tempted to provide regional targets. Much more important is that the overall national targets should be broken down by categories of specific problems. Within the national targets, the Secretary of State should recognise the necessity for targets to increase public transport in rural areas and to keep lorries and other heavy goods vehicles on appropriate roads and off inappropriate ones, but also the necessity for an entirely different set of targets to reduce urban congestion and consequent pollution. Without that fine-tuning of the national targets, I am very much afraid that the net effect of the Bill will be small.

Mr. Paterson: It is all very well setting targets, but how does my hon. Friend suggest the Minister introduces practical measures to achieve them?

Mr. Green: That is a very important point. In many ways, I would prefer the national targets set out in the Bill to be put into effect at local level, instead of the decision being taken by Ministers or officials in Whitehall. Each locality will know what measures and targets are appropriate for its area and will be able to make a much more practical and sensitive response to the needs of local people.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I thank my hon. Friend for his customary courtesy in giving way. My local authority wrote to me asking me to support the Bill because, certainly at that time, it believed that the Bill would give it the power to set its own targets. Unfortunately, that is no longer in the Bill before us.

Mr. Green: I am interested to hear what my hon. Friend says, because legislation already exists that enables local authorities to do just that. The Bill refers specifically to national targets. I am interested to learn that my hon. Friend's local authority wants to set local targets, and, in view of what we are learning from this morning's debate, perhaps he will be able to guide his authority in an appropriate direction, for which I know it will be extremely grateful.

I was talking about the interface between national and local targets. One hopes that the Bill has some practical effect, not least because, as hon. Members have already observed, our postbags have been bulging with letters on this issue—although I have to say that I have received more mail on other subjects. It is certainly true that there is a widespread expectation that, once the Bill has been debated, and, I hope, passed, something will happen and there will be a reduction in road traffic. However, the mechanism for getting from here to there is not apparent unless the Secretary of State takes up the responsibilities given to him in clause 2(1) but neatly taken from him in clause 2(2).

When the fine tuning to which I referred takes place, it is important that it is appropriate. My local authority in Ashford is going through a phase of closing roads. It regards that as an appropriate way to improve the flow of traffic through the town. Many local businesses are extremely anxious and oppose individual road closures, and are probably right to do so. Local authorities that take a fairly broad-brush approach may well get it wrong and cause economic damage.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion pointed out that there are economic aspects to the traffic problem, so some economic analysis is needed. The Bill mentions the economic damage caused by excessive traffic, but the House must recognise that economic damage can also be caused by inappropriate traffic reduction measures. Once the Bill is passed, one hopes that those who are required to implement it will strike the proper balance.

As I said, my constituency is half rural. The traffic changes that rural dwellers are seeking are not the same as those sought by urban dwellers. One of the weaker parts of the Bill is its reference to the provision of adequate taxi services in rural and non-rural areas. I am sure it is clear to the Bill's promoter that those who are most concerned about the provision of transport in rural areas are those least likely to be regular users of taxis. Taxis in rural areas tend to be extremely expensive. Constituents who complain to me about public transport in their villages tend to be either young people or the elderly and the retired who cannot afford regular journeys by taxi, so more thought is needed on that issue.

In the end, cost will be the key. If there is to be a serious attempt to reduce the use of private cars in rural areas through the increased provision of public transport, I have to tell the Minister in all conscience that the £50 million nationally that the Government provided in the Budget is only a drop in the ocean. For the Minister's sake, I hope that the Government do not talk that up too much as a great initiative because in a year or two people will be saying that it has made no impact in their areas.

I hope that the Bill will focus the Secretary of State's mind on the transport issues that people regard as important. In my constituency, the fact that the M20 is inappropriately surfaced, making it one of the noisiest motorways in the country as it passes through an urban area, is regarded as important. If we are seen to be tackling transport issues in a way that opinion polls show most people approve of, but there are no practical improvements on the ground, we are in danger of bringing the House into disrepute. People will say that we are just talking and having no practical effect on their lives. That would be disappointing, because the hon. Member for Ceredigion has seized the public mood and moved the debate forward a few inches. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that we do not encourage impractical and inappropriate measures, but that we do not ignore the public mood.

One of my colleagues said that the best he could say about the Bill was that it would not do much harm. Judging from my short time in the House, it seems that,

[Mr. Green]

if we are passing a Bill that does not do much harm, it will be one of the better Bills that we shall be passing this Session.

I commend the Bill to the House.

11.17 am

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I support the Bill's Third Reading and echo what many colleagues have said. Nothing in the Bill appears to be tyrannous. It certainly has the right intentions and reflects what our citizens know must happen in the next 20 years, which is that at least the rate of growth in traffic has to slow down.

I do not for one moment expect the targets that have been mentioned to be achieved. In my constituency, I have not been lobbied in support the Bill, but I have had many letters from pensioners in rural areas complaining about the increase in the price of petrol and wondering how they are going to cope with that.

I hope that the Bill will tease out precisely what the Government's policy on targeting is. I do not wish to put at risk the Arundel bypass scheme, which will be a very necessary relief to congestion on the A27. I thought that the Minister was in favour of a specific 10 per cent. national target, but the fact that the Government have taken the teeth out of the Bill suggests that they are not. I do not know whether they are looking to a targeting system that is aggregated from local targets, or whether they are abandoning the entire concept, which in any case has many flaws. I hope that the Minister will comment on that in her reply.

I am disappointed that the Bill does not focus more on ways of relieving traffic growth and congestion; I had hoped it would widen the territory on which the Minister was required to report annually. I should like to concentrate specifically on fiscal incentives.

One of the largest employers in my constituency is a mushroom grower that employs 500 people, mostly ladies who work different shifts. The company used to run a bus that took them to and from work. When the Inland Revenue told the company that the bus was a taxable benefit in kind, that records would have to be kept and all sorts of other nasty things, the company said, "Forget it," with the result that there are now another 300 cars on the road.

I wrote to the previous Government and, shortly after having the privilege of being elected to represent Arundel and South Downs, I also wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister, but I regret that I received no reply. Fiscal support, not discouragement, to companies, to bus people into work, particularly in rural areas, could be an important factor in reducing traffic growth and congestion.

Reference has been made to children being driven to school. I would comment selfishly that, as I drive to and from the House, I notice the dramatic difference in London traffic in the school holidays and in term time. A fiscal incentive for schools to provide more buses could be extremely positive.

Mr. Swayne: It is not always a matter of transport not being provided. I recently visited a sixth form college and was aghast to discover that a large proportion of the pupils drove to school, despite adequate transport provision. It was a matter of choice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We appear to be having what is almost a Second Reading debate. On Third Reading we must discuss what is in the Bill and not our experiences in the constituencies we represent.

Mr. Flight: I was alluding to the matters on which the Bill requires the Minister to report, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They probably include the causes of congestion and increase in traffic. Having visited the United States a great deal—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me help the hon. Gentleman. At this stage we should not worry about the causes, which should have been addressed on Second Reading and in Committee. Now, on Third Reading, we must consider only the Bill that is before us.

Mr. Flight: I hope that the Government will take the reporting requirements in the Bill to cover a survey of the causes of congestion and rising traffic usage. I hope that such a survey will also include analogies with the way in which other countries are tackling the problems addressed in the Bill.

I welcome the sentiments in the Bill. It is unlikely that it will do much to reduce congestion and road traffic, as that will depend on how the Government use it. I should like to know what their position is on targeting and how they propose to use the reporting requirements. I am nervous that the Bill will become a propaganda sound bite, used to give the impression that the Government are doing something to reduce road traffic when, in reality, virtually nothing is being done. The Government's draft guidance on traffic reduction under the 1997 Act is rather weaker than the promises by John Watts when he was Transport Minister in a previous Government.

11.24 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): First, let me declare a minor interest. It is not one for which I receive money; indeed, I pay for it. I have been a member of Friends of the Earth for some years, although I do not always agree with that organisation—I often disagree with organisations that I support, and that included the previous Conservative Government.

I welcome the Bill—I am a junior sponsor of it—as an important step in the right direction. We heard that it wasted a lot of paper, but it is a very small Bill. Sadly, I do not think that it is printed on recycled paper. It is also very cheap at £1.10, if anyone wishes to buy it. It represents a step towards reducing traffic.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis), who represents a particularly beautiful part of the country that I hope will remain part of the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future. He has stuck tenaciously to the issue, and the Bill is now progressing to Third Reading.

We all know that the Bill is not perfect, but we have to start somewhere. We have to consider how to reduce road traffic. My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) made some excellent points, and I shall reiterate two or three of them.

Cycling to school was commonplace when many of us were young. I cycled or walked to school most of the time. It is an obvious way of reducing what accounts for

25 per cent. of traffic in some places during school terms. I hope that the Minister will be active in encouraging road traffic reduction by those means.

Old photographs from the 1930s and post-war show that a huge number of people cycled to work. Now it seems infra dig. We cannot compel people to ride bicycles, but we should encourage them to do so. People drive to the shops when it might be just as easy to walk. I shall not dwell long on my constituency, where there is a large shopping centre at Fosse park. At Christmas time people have to park nearly half a mile away and walk to the shops because of the congestion.

There are many ways of reducing traffic. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) mentioned the fiscal angle. He is absolutely right. We have to encourage a change of behaviour, attitude and culture, and the Bill takes us one step towards that. We all want to reduce congestion, emissions, noise and the incidence of asthma. We want to stop new roads being built through attractive countryside. That is self-evident. The Government and all hon. Members can play a part in influencing and managing the choices that people make.

Mr. Paterson: As a member of Friends of the Earth, can my hon. Friend enlighten us as to what practical measures Friends of the Earth would take to achieve those desirable targets?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to remind us what Friends of the Earth would do. He must address the Bill.

Mr. Robathan: Not only do I bow to your wisdom, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am not a walking encyclopaedia of the policies that Friends of the Earth would have us pursue. I have already mentioned two or three that I know it would support, such as encouraging people to cycle to work and school.

The Government have a role in influencing and promoting choices. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I am against compelling or restricting people or legislating unnecessarily, but the Bill encourages us in the right direction.

In defence of the previous Government, may I say that the former Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), is most committed to cycling, and was chairman of the all-party cycling group. He is also more committed than most hon. Members to reducing road traffic. It was unnecessary for the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) to attack the previous Government, because, in the previous Parliament, I attacked them for displaying much the same attitude as is now displayed by the Labour Government. A former Minister, Steve Norris, became a convert to, and an active promoter of, the cycling strategy, as I am sure the Minister for Transport in London would admit.

The present Government's reaction to the Bill, which is the most pertinent point in this debate, has been to remove from the face of the Bill the road traffic reduction targets, which are what the Bill was all about. Its title is the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, yet it contains no targets, which I find rather distressing. I should like genuine targets to be put into the Bill, and I hope that the Minister will set such targets at some stage.

Road traffic reduction is a question of influencing people and setting an example. My right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire bicycles, as do I. I tackled the previous Government on this question as I do the present Government: perhaps Ministers should set an example by not being ferried around in large Jaguars, and by making greater use of public transport, their own feet and bicycles.

How many of the hon. Members who support the Bill regularly use public transport around London? How many use buses, trains, bicycles or their feet? It distresses me to see the large number of people who come not more than a mile and a half to this place by motor car every day. I shall not say how I got here today, but it involved no more than two wheels and a bit of puffing.

Mr. Flight: Was it by train?

Mr. Robathan: No, not a train—a bicycle.

One might say that, to a certain extent, the Bill is all about good intentions, but it is not merely about platitudes. It is about influencing people and setting a good example. It is also about individual action and choice, because individuals must be allowed to determine how they get to their destination. I confess that, when I am not in the Chamber on a Friday, I drive out of London to my constituency. The Government and Parliament have their role in influencing behaviour, and that requires us all—Members of Parliament and those outside as well—to put our actions where our mouth is. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, it is no good saying that we want to see road traffic reduction and then demanding extra car parking space. People must make the connection and be encouraged to use their feet.

If targets were good enough for Kyoto, as the Minister said on Second Reading, it is strange that we should not have targets in this Bill. However, the targets have been removed, and although the Minister has said that she will be setting targets later, traffic will not reduced and the targets will not be met with fine words, good intentions, platitudes or, indeed, well-meaning legislation. Traffic will be reduced by the action of us all, both individually and collectively, but it is Government action to which we look forward.

When the Secretary of State comes to setting targets and publishing a report, we shall examine how the Government have acted; if the Secretary of State falls back on clause 2(2) and takes advantage of the fact that he or she will not be

"obliged to comply with the requirements",

we shall take up that issue as well.

11.32 am

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Some weeks ago, when I rose to speak in a Third Reading debate, I was swiftly silenced by the Chair because I dwelt on what I thought should be in that Bill, what it ought to do and what it did not do, rather than concentrating on what it did do. This morning, I shall put great effort into remaining within order, but the fact that this Bill does nothing at all presents me with a difficulty in speaking about what it does.

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

When the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) introduced the Bill, I agreed with his words in every respect. He said that the Bill was underlined by three questions, the first of which was, why should we reduce traffic? He gave the reasons of health, environmental impact and economic benefit, which are laid out in the Bill and which will flow from the goal to which the Bill aspires. In that respect, I entirely support the Bill.

On the other two questions—by how much and how we might reduce traffic—the Bill is silent. That was my difficulty when several constituents asked me to sign the original early-day motion. I entirely supported the thrust and the goal of the early-day motion, but felt that it was somewhat irresponsible simply to state a target and say that it was desirable without giving any consideration to how that target was to be achieved.

The Bill in its original form would have been a far stronger measure than it has turned out to be. It began its life as the Road Traffic Reduction (United Kingdom Targets) Bill, but the targets have been removed. It is politics of the worst sort when a problem is perceived and examined but, instead of dealing with a solution, we end up merely posturing. It is no fault of the hon. Member for Ceredigion, but the Bill as it is now is posturing.

The reason why we have ended up with a targets Bill that has no targets is the attitude displayed by Ministers. Much posturing went on before the general election, and all sorts of early-day motions and petitions were signed and undertakings given about level of traffic and the reduction required; but, once in government, Labour has ensured that, for the Bill to receive a Third Reading, the targets had to be removed. It is monstrous, and Ministers have behaved absolutely unforgivably. This country faces an enormous problem of traffic increase and we sought to set targets for a reduction in traffic, but we now have a Bill from which those targets have been removed. That is most unsatisfactory.

11.36 am

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I regret to say that I have listened to the debate with increasing incredulity. Legislation is a serious matter and we should not legislate unless there is a clear reason for doing so and the legislation will actually achieve something. In their speeches, my hon. Friends have gently welcomed the Bill and then pointed out that it will achieve very little.

I, like other hon. Members, have received representations from constituents as the Bill has metamorphosed from its original form to that which we are debating this morning. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), I have no quibble with what Ministers have had to do to the Bill in order to be able to agree to it. I recognise the difficulty of setting down national targets in legislation and of achieving those targets and thereby achieving the overall policy objective, which is to improve the quality of life of us all.

There are endless means at the Government's disposal to achieve that objective. One way is to increase fuel duties, but we can perceive all sorts of difficulties with that, not the least of which is rural concerns not being identical with urban concerns. Therefore, as a method of achieving a national target, increasing fuel duties cannot work.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, local councils face difficulties in achieving their objectives—when they close roads, problems are caused for local traders.

The issues are difficult, and the Minister has my sympathy in trying to meet the targets that the Government properly signed up to in Kyoto. I understand why they thought it necessary to gut the Bill, but, having gutted it, why do we not get rid of it? The Bill represents the minimum necessary to give a nod to what all hon. Members would consider appropriate objectives.

It is a perfectly legitimate criticism to say that the House passes far too much legislation. Under any deregulation initiative worth the name, the Bill would fail. It is a matter for the Government whether they want their poor, beleaguered civil servants to produce yet another glossy brochure and more briefing materials, to explain to the public and the Environmental Audit Committee why the targets cannot be set. The only contribution that the Bill would make to road traffic reduction would be negative—a marginal increase in paper production would be needed to produce all the glossy brochures, which would have to be distributed to all the interested parties.

I disagree with hon. Members who have said that we can exert influence only through legislation—we do not need legislation to exhort and to influence people. It is a shame that we have allowed the Bill to get so far, as it is not well able to achieve the objectives that we all support. It is up to the Government if they want to take on more onerous responsibilities, but under a deregulation initiative in years to come, the Bill will not be thought to have been worth the trouble.

11.41 am

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I heartily congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) on the fact that the Bill has come so far. One has to admire someone with strong beliefs, who is elected to Parliament and then brings a private Member's Bill to Third Reading—he must be feeling pretty tense now, as we have been speaking for more than two hours.

I am frustrated, however, as I feel that the Bill represents a missed opportunity. I do not think that any hon. Member believes that traffic, of itself, is good. The Bill outlines the negative aspects of traffic, and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) mentioned asthma. I used to be asthmatic and I have two children who are asthmatic, although my family are lucky enough to have been brought up in the countryside, where there are few emissions.

The Bill completely ignores the benefits that the motorised vehicle has brought to our civilisation. All hon. Members have had clothes brought to the House in a motorised vehicle—all the food that we have eaten here today was brought on a truck—and drugs to improve the health of children with asthma travel to chemists' shops on lorries. The Bill will do nothing to change the fact that some traffic is essential.

The Bill confuses excess traffic with congestion. I give two examples from my constituency, where there are severe traffic problems that the Bill will do nothing to help. The Minister was good enough to listen to what I said in an Adjournment debate on the A5, which is not only a national trunk road, but part of the European network—it is critical in moving traffic round Europe. In

a road that runs from Felixstowe to Holyhead, 32 miles are single-carriage—those stretches have hardly changed since they were built by Thomas Telford.

The Bill will do nothing to alter the awful situation on that road, where accidents occur every week. As the Minister knows, 25 people have been killed in the past five years, and two weeks ago, two French lorries ran into each other. The Bill may lead the Government down the wrong route of believing that all road building is evil. I believe that a new road must be built in my constituency, as the traffic that is essential to the economy of my area is increasing.

I give another example—in this case, the problem is congestion rather than traffic. The village of Hodnet has been waiting for a bypass for 40 years—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, the hon. Gentleman is raising constituency matters, which is understandable, as I know that he wants to draw those problems to the attention of the House. However, he must talk about the Bill. He could have raised those matters on Second Reading or in Committee, but he must not mention them on Third Reading.

Mr. Paterson: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for tripping me up. I wanted to draw the attention of the House to the fact that, although the Bill is well meaning, national targets will not bring practical benefits to my constituency. Much of our debate has been abstract, whereas I have tried to be concrete and practical.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said—I am delighted that he has resumed his seat, as I can now compliment him—national targets would not work, and most traffic decisions should be taken by local authorities, which understand local problems. In the Soviet Union, national targets were set on the kaleidoscopic activities of the Soviet economy, but they failed completely—it was a total disaster. I cannot see how a Minister in London can set a national target, as there is so much diversity in local economies. I agree with my hon. Friend that targets should be set locally, if they are to be set at all.

We have not sufficiently discussed how the targets can be achieved. In my interventions, I have tried to draw the attention of the House to pricing, as I am convinced that we can reduce traffic only by ensuring that the car or lorry driver thinks before he sticks his key in the ignition, and asks himself whether he needs to make that marginal journey.

I do not believe that the Government thoroughly understand how a market economy works. They have misunderstood how to use the pricing mechanism, and have imposed a vicious increase in fuel duties, which has a blunderbuss effect.

Mr. Dafis: I should point out that the road fuel escalator was devised by the previous Government; the current Government have increased it by 1 per cent.

Mr. Paterson: I am fully aware of that. I do not have to endorse everything that the previous Government did, as I was not a Member of Parliament at the time—I was in business, travelling around the world picking up practical experience, which I am now trying to bring to the House.

Mr. Graham Allen (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): Tell us about the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Paterson: I should be delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman about the CAP another time, as I have very strong views about that, too. The question of fuel duties is fundamental—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not like interrupting any hon. Member, but I must do so today. Unless I am reading a different Bill, I cannot see that it mentions fuel duties. The hon. Gentleman could have raised the matter in Committee, but not on Third Reading—we are rather restricted today.

Mr. Paterson: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for putting me on the right road again.

I was arguing that national targets will not work. I am a confirmed believer in the market, which already works in our transport system by rationing. Traffic will not be reduced unless the marginal cost of the marginal journey hurts the transport consumer. If one wanted to go to from Shropshire to London, it should be unthinkable to take a car through the centre of Birmingham on a motorway. There should be some price mechanism, some barriers to doing so. I have seen such measures working in Oslo, in Bergen and in Singapore. Even the Mersey tunnel has an electronically run toll system; the technology is there.

I would criticise the previous Government for not introducing road pricing. I regret the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley), who said that studies had shown that road pricing would not work, is no longer in the Chamber. I should have liked to hear why road pricing would not work, because I believe that it is the only practical system that will achieve the Bill's laudable aims. I should be most grateful if the Minister would inform us whether the Government have any plans to trial road pricing schemes.

11.49 am

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I wish to say a few words of support for the Bill. It has had a fair outing this morning, but that is perfectly legitimate, in that many colleagues from different parts of the country have had worries about the Bill, ever since we debated earlier measures in the previous Parliament.

The Government have obviously had concerns, and have insisted on a dilution of the Bill, because they no longer wish to be tied to set targets of the type that they were faithfully promising their electors before the general election. That is why the Bill contains the get-out in clause 2(2) that, if the Secretary of State does not want to set a target, he or she must publish a report setting out alternative means. I shall comment on that later.

Unlike some of my colleagues, perhaps, I have no objection to national targets being set. If one is to achieve anything, one must start with a national target. At Rio, we started with international targets—world targets—and Kyoto has continued the work. Those of us who were there first, saving the world, agreed with that, but unless one starts with national targets, it will be impossible to achieve change in an individual parish in Scotland, England or Wales. Therefore, I have no qualms about the Government going down the route of setting a national target.

[Mr. David Maclean]

However, I wish that the Bill had taken into account the fact that targets that may be necessary to reduce congestion in London or other cities, or targets to reduce traffic in London or other cities where there is poor air quality, should be more stringent than those for rural areas. I hope that we shall receive the Government's assurance that they will take such considerations into account when setting a national target. Incidentally, many of us who do not live in London permanently, but are visitors here during the week, suspect that the smog in London is caused, not by motor cars, but by very dirty buses; one is never allowed to point out that diesel engines can do as much as petrol engines to cause poor air quality.

There are especially severe problems of congestion and poor air quality—and, no doubt, social impacts of motoring—in some cities and conurbations. However, I wish that the Bill contained a requirement to the effect that, when setting targets to tackle those pressing problems, and to reduce the ill effects on the health of people in large conurbations, where there may be a perception of too much traffic, at the wrong time of day, and not spread over a long enough period—altering which could deal with much of the problem—the Government must not penalise the many rural motorists who do not suffer congestion or air quality problems.

No doubt vehicle emissions in rural areas contribute to overall CO_2 levels and to greenhouse gas, so we should have controls to ensure that the total amount of CO_2 produced by vehicles nationally—whether they are in the rural lanes of Shropshire or Cumbria or in the busy streets of London—does not exceed the targets that the Government have adopted.

I believe that the Government have been rash in trying to adopt in Britain stricter targets than those that have been adopted in the rest of the world. The message that came through to me loud and clear when I was negotiating at Rio was that, however much Britain and western Europe may show that they are the good guys in cutting CO_2, the Americans would be slightly behind us and China would not do a thing about it.

China, with its sulphurous coal and some of the dirtiest power stations in the world, made it very clear five years ago—I believe that its attitude hardly changed at Kyoto—that, as a developing economy, it regarded global CO_2 targets and measures to control its emissions, not as something good to save the world, but as a nasty western capitalist plot to hold back its development.

Mr. Forth: In that context, can my right hon. Friend confirm what I have been led to believe: that domestic heating can give rise to almost as much atmospheric pollution as motor vehicles, if not more? Is he not surprised, therefore, that the Government reduced tax on domestic heating fuels at the same time as increasing taxes on motor vehicle fuels? How does my right hon. Friend square that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want the right hon. Gentleman to square that, because it is nothing to do with the Bill.

Mr. Maclean: Those in another place might insert a good amendment on that. I shall not go down the route of considering domestic heating in this country, but I shall mention domestic heating in another country.

In India, the country with the second largest population, the huge amount of pollution is caused not by motor vehicles but by fires from heating appliances for the population of 800 million. An astronomical amount of fuel is burned in domestic heating stoves. India does have dirty, polluting cars in cities, but I suspect that the amount of fuel used in fuel-burning stoves is one of the biggest contributors to pollution there. I know that the Foreign Office was engaged in measures to plant a huge number of eucalyptus forests to supply India with more fuel for fires, adding to the problem.

I shall not stray further into that subject. I am merely arguing that, when we are setting national targets to tackle problems in this country, we must never lose sight of the fact that, however much we control our emissions of noxious gases, of CO_2 and other gases from road vehicles—and there are merits in controlling them, to control health problems as well as the total amount of CO_2—our contribution is but a small pin-prick among the CO_2 producers in the world. That is not to say that we should not do our bit.

Mr. Green: Has my right hon. Friend considered that the get-out clause in the Bill, which allows the Secretary of State not to impose the national targets, might be appropriately used if this country were doing all that it could to reduce noxious CO_2 emissions, but, as other countries were deliberately not doing so, our efforts here were having no significant impact on global warming?

Mr. Maclean: That would be the only legitimate use of the get-out clause. It was naive and foolish of the Government to come back from Kyoto saying that they had signed up to larger targets than anyone else. Because of the work of the former Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), we are not one of the worst producers of carbon dioxide or sulphur emissions. That is not to say that we should rest up and do nothing more, but we are among the good guys at the top of the league table. If we are to set a good example—more so than other countries—we could end up unfairly impinging on rural constituents.

It is easy to set targets. In the past 18 months, we have had three huge rises in petrol prices, which are impinging disproportionately and unfairly on rural constituents. They have not done much good in terms of dealing with the problem of carbon dioxide emissions. Nor have they solved the air quality problems in London.

The Government will be urban-centred in their approach, and will develop measures that will force people out of their motor cars and on to public transport in the major cities. That can be done, to a certain extent. However, there is no magical integrated transport policy that this or any other Government can think of which can force people in rural counties back on to buses or trains—they just do not exist in large parts of the country.

The Government say that we should go back to the magical days of 1978 before the Tories liberalised the buses. Possibly, there were more buses at that time. We had one on a Saturday going to Penrith—now, we might not have that one bus on a Saturday. However, there was no magical time when buses were running in rural areas every half hour. Most rural areas, if they were lucky, had one bus a week. It is pie in the sky to believe that a grant

of £50 million, spread around the rural areas of England, will give us an alternative transport system that will enable people to give up their cars.

I give up my car most of the week—once I drive the 15 miles to Penrith, I get on a train. I should happily do that for ever more and use Branson's service on the west coast main line. However, there is no alternative to my making that car journey, and there is no alternative for thousands of my constituents.

Mr. Forth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, since the late 1970s, the large increase in car ownership—thanks to the general affluence that our country enjoyed under the previous Conservative Government—has meant that more cars are available to families? Therefore, the challenge is that much greater, in attempting to shift traffic back to buses or any other means of transport. Going back to what happened in terms of bus availability in the 1970s would not be sufficient because, happily, we have more cars, as people have chosen them to travel in.

Mr. Maclean: There has been a steady increase in car ownership since the second world war—it is probably an exponential curve. One might conclude that that is a bad thing, but I would not. It has liberated many of my rural constituents who never had an adequate bus service, even immediately after the war. I meet some wonderful old constituents who reminisce about travelling by bus to Penrith on market day. When I ask why they travelled only on market day, they reply that they had buses only on a Tuesday. Even before the war, there was only one bus, on a Tuesday. They remember times during the war when special service buses were laid on, and they could hitch a lift on them. That was not just in Cumbria—most other large rural counties were the same.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman may not have been in the Chamber when I said that making lengthy references to one's constituency is perhaps good for another time, but not for a Third Reading debate.

Mr. Maclean: I accept your chiding, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was attempting to draw attention to the difficulties and dangers of setting broad-brush national targets that do not take into account the needs of millions of constituents in rural areas who do not suffer from the problems listed in subsection (3).

I have no difficulty with the Government setting national targets, provided that they give us some guidance. I hope that the Minister will tell us clearly that when the Government set their national targets, they will take into account the needs of constituents who do not live in the cities—London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle—in which an integrated transport policy could work.

In those cities, many hundreds of thousands of people could be persuaded to use public transport systems—if they were boosted by more investment—as an alternative. There is no alternative, in large parts of the rest of the country, for the majority of the British people. There is no alternative, even if the Government put up the price of petrol to £10 or £15 a gallon. They will only bring about more poverty in rural areas and they will not be able to force people on to a public transport system that does not exist.

I want to hear from the Minister today how she proposes to set those national targets. I want to hear in what circumstances the Government will use the opt-out in clause 2(2). The opt-out is there for one clear reason: to deal with all the pledges that were made by the Minister and others who signed up to 10 per cent. targets in I do not know how many early-day motions. For the past three years, various early-day motions were signed by the Minister and others, pledging themselves to a 10 per cent. target on road traffic reduction.

Several Ministers in the present Government said that they believed in a 10 per cent. road traffic reduction. We have the names of all the Ministers serving in the present Government who signed early-day motions calling for 10 per cent. targets, right up to 1 May.

I know how our able civil service works when faced with a problem. If the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) is accepted, it will cause embarrassment to 20 Ministers who signed up to 10 per cent. targets. It is not in the nature of civil servants to cause embarrassment to Ministers, whom they must serve as efficiently as they can. Therefore, there is an excellent get-out. If, for whatever good reason, the Minister does not think that a set target under clause 2(1) is appropriate, the Minister may set aside that target, provided that there is a report to Parliament explaining that there are better alternative means.

The phraseology is good. I remember similar suggestions being made to me, sitting around a Government table looking for ways of getting out of a problem. Subsection (2) is a cop-out, to get the Minister and her colleagues out of an awful pickle.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I understand why my right hon. Friend says that subsection (2) is a cop-out, but does he agree that even from a cop-out, good can come? Subsection (2) focuses the mind of the Minister statutorily on the need to consider what environmental damage road traffic is doing—for example, in rural areas such as he and I represent—and the need for bypasses and health and safety measures in small villages that are snarled up by road traffic. That is a beneficial side-effect, which we hope the Minister will grasp with all her usual enthusiasm.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. I am merely drawing attention to the Government's hypocrisy in running with the cop-out clause. They are anxious to get themselves off the hook of their firm pledge to many organisations such as Friends of the Earth, and the early-day motions that they signed, pledging themselves to a 10 per cent. road traffic reduction target and no cop-out.

Before the election, it was suggested that the Secretary of State could ignore the 10 per cent. target and produce a report setting out the reasons—good stuff, but that was not acceptable. The then Opposition would have considered that a fudge. If the previous Government had produced a measure such as clause 2(2), the hon. Lady and all her hon. Friends would have accused us of not taking road traffic reduction seriously. They would have said that they had a 10 per cent. target, and that the measure was just a fudge to get the Tory Government off the hook.

Now the Government are using the fudge and trying to get themselves off the hook. However, my right hon. and learned Friend is right: good can come of it. We know that

[Mr. Maclean]

the Government will not set a target. If they had wanted to set a target of 10 per cent., or a 7, 5 or 2 per cent. target, they would have done so. They would be in the House today boasting about it. We would hear that they had fulfilled yet another pre-election pledge from Hampstead high street.

We shall not get that from the Government. Instead, they will dress up subsection (2) and the progress that they will attempt to make in that regard, and they will present that as meeting their targets. When they do so, I hope that they will examine the needs of rural areas, and consider the contribution that heating may make, the contribution that extra insulation may make, and the excellent bodies that we set up in government, such as the Home Energy Conservation Trust and various other—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is straying from the Bill again.

Mr. Maclean: I shall return to it straight away, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that the Minister will be honest about how she believes clause 2(2) will work. We need to know in what circumstances the Government will be tempted to set a target of 2, 5 or 10 per cent., as Labour pledged to do before the election. In what circumstances will the Government tell the House and the hon. Member for Ceredigion, the promoter of the Bill, "We're sorry, we accept the Bill and it will pass, but we shall use the powers in clause 2(2): we shall publish a report and set out the reasons why we are not running with the target"?

The House deserves to know today the Government's intentions on target setting. I suspect that we shall never see a firm road traffic reduction target. If such a national target is announced, I am afraid that it will be a broad-brush target that will inflict massive damage on those who do not have access to the transport systems that exist in only a few major cities in England and in Glasgow, which has an excellent system.

Does the Minister intend to set a firm target for road traffic reduction? If not, what criteria will the Government use to let themselves off the hook and go for the get-out in clause 2(2)? Will the Minister give a commitment that the Government will not set targets that disadvantage millions of people in counties that do not have access to the road system—not just a few Tory supporters in a few Tory seats, but many of those in rural areas whom Labour Members now boast that they represent? Those people should not suffer as a result of the Government's desire to show that they are better at clobbering road traffic than other Governments in Europe.

12.11 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): This has been an excellent debate, in which 12 of my right hon. and hon. Friends have participated to great effect. The promoter of the Bill, the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis), also spoke, and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) made a short intervention. I think it is significant that we have not heard anything from Labour Members so far—we obviously eagerly anticipate the Minister's speech. It is a very different scenario from that on Second Reading, when the Chamber was bulging with aspirants from the Government Benches seeking to show their support for the Bill. The fact that they are not here today may suggest that they are beginning to realise that the Government are engaged in a cynical exercise regarding this Bill.

The Bill is significantly different from the legislation that was before us on Second Reading on 31 January. I sympathise with the hon. Member for Ceredigion about the Government's systematic emasculation of his Bill during its passage through the House. He has assured me that he and the Bill's sponsors are not content with the legislation in its present form, but believe that this Bill is better than none at all, and would prefer to see it on the statute book. However, if they are lucky in the ballot and can persuade an hon. Member to take up the issue, they have promised to return in a subsequent session—in the same way that they returned in this session because they were dissatisfied with progress in the previous one—in an attempt to achieve their objective.

The Bill's title has changed since Second Reading: it now refers to "National Targets" rather than "United Kingdom Targets". The substance has also changed significantly. Clause 2—and, to a large extent, clause 1—has effectively been rewritten. The time scales in the Bill on Second Reading have been removed, and I submit that the Government have acted very cynically. As several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, this is nothing but declaratory legislation: it gives the Government the power to do that which it could do already if it had the political will.

If one seeks an analogy, one need look no further than what happened with road casualty reduction targets. We did not require legislation or a private Members' Bill to establish those targets. That was achieved to great effect by the previous Government when my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) was a Transport Minister. Those targets have been very influential. They were realistic and they have been achieved. They set a framework within which local authorities, the Highways Agency and others concerned about road safety could operate.

The Government could do the same thing with traffic if they had the will to do so. The Bill panders to popular concern about congestion and pollution but does nothing to solve the problem. Indeed, the Bill is about good images rather than reality. The Government are obsessed with image. If one wants further evidence of that, one need go no further than today's front page story of *The Times*, which gives an interesting backcloth to today's debate, because it refers to an important meeting in Chester today of European Environment and Transport Ministers, convened by the Deputy Prime Minister acting in his capacity as Chairman of the Transport Council during our presidency of the European Union.

One might have thought that a Government committed to integrated transport and to reducing road traffic in absolute terms would have taken the opportunity to ensure that all the delegates travelled to the conference by public transport, but we learn that the delegates—and, because it is a European event, their partners—and officials will arrive at Manchester airport, where they will be met by 60 cars to take them to Chester to discuss why other people should travel by public transport.

Apparently, the arrangements for the conference were discussed by Whitehall officials, who examined train services between the airport and Chester and suggested

that the condition of Crewe station, where the overseas visitors would need to change, gave a poor image of Britain's railway network. That is what this is all about—image. The Bill is about mood music; somehow the Government are committed to reducing the adverse impact of traffic and are in favour of traffic reduction.

There was an opportunity for the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who is Chairman of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Transport Sub-Committee, and a distinguished Member of the House, to meet some of these dignitaries from Europe in her constituency. She would have been able to draw their attention to the substantial new investment in Crewe railway station following the privatisation of Railtrack. She has been denied that opportunity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying from the contents of the Bill. He must speak to the Bill.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham) *rose—*

Mr. Chope: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Atkinson: Was it not a pity that a special train was not selected? They could have hired one, covered in Walt Disney cartoon characters, from north London sidings to take the delegates to Chester.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend makes an excellent suggestion, but it may be too humorous to find favour with the Government.

This is not an isolated incident. The Government talk about a rationale of having an integrated transport policy and an inclusive society, but nothing is less inclusive and more exclusive than people travelling in limousines from Manchester airport to Chester.

Mr. Robathan: I specifically refer to the Bill. Surely we must all play our part if we wish to see road traffic reduced, and that particularly involves the example that might be given by our Government and the Governments of the European Union. Frankly, does not my hon. Friend think—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already stated that the point has been made. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) must move on. The behaviour of the Government is not in question. We are considering the Bill.

Mr. Chope: I accept that absolutely. In answer to my hon. Friend's intervention, after the local government conference in Scarborough this year, which was organised by the Labour party, the Deputy Prime Minister left from Scarborough station, in front of the cameras, and then stopped at the next station to get into his car—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want to have to be on my feet again. It is not good for the House. Hon. Members must abide by the rules that they have made. I do not want to hear about the behaviour of any Minister. I want to hear about the Bill.

Mr. Chope: I accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although the Secretary of State who will be given absolute discretion under the terms of the Bill is the Deputy Prime Minister, to whom I was referring, I accept your ruling.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I have been wondering whether my hon. Friend is doing justice to the Bill. If he focuses on clause 2(2), he will find that the Secretary of State, if he does not want to have targets for reduction, must consider other methods. For example, if there were a situation in which people would travel to a particular destination in a large number of cars, black or otherwise, there would be an obligation under clause 2(2), would there not, for the Secretary of State to consider whether two buses would do the trick instead and create less environmental pollution?

Mr. Chope: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. The Deputy Prime Minister could go further than that. Much of the discussion in Committee and that which has taken place behind the Bill, as it were, has reflected the idea that people do not need to travel as much as they do. What is to stop European Environment and Transport Ministers meeting by video conference link, thereby obviating the need for them to travel by aeroplane or car?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) about the Secretary of State's discretion is an important one. It will be within the recollection of the House that, when Transport Ministers came to this country 10 or 11 years ago, the provisions of the proposed clause 2(2) were fulfilled and those Ministers were taken round the country, including Scotland, by train.

Mr. Chope: It is not a surprise to me to hear that that is what happened under the previous Government.

As my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, the Bill does not require any targets to be set. Only if targets are set is there any requirement to report progress in relation to them. The hon. Member for Ceredigion now agrees with me that there is a large loophole in the Bill, bearing in mind what he believed the Bill would achieve given the drafting of clause 2(2). I am grateful for his response, following my intervention in his opening speech on Third Reading, that he will return to that issue in the other place. It seems that he will try to get some of his supporters to return to the issue.

The hon. Gentleman takes the view that the Government are of a generous spirit and are committed to the targets. That is where I disagree with him. If the Government are committed to targets, why have they insisted that there should be no unequivocal requirement to set targets in the Bill? Why has clause 2 been emasculated by the Government if in reality they are committed to the targets? Perhaps the realities are beginning to dawn.

There were the easy words and the easy signature that came from the Minister in Hampstead high street on 8 February 1997, when she signed up to a 10 per cent. reduction in traffic by the year 2010 compared with the level of traffic in 1990. When she came into office, she must have realised that that target would be difficult to achieve without imposing the most amazing restrictions on the travelling public.

In 1990, 250 billion vehicle miles were being travelled in this country. A 10 per cent. reduction would have reduced that figure to 225 billion miles. We know, on the

[Mr. Chope]

Government's 1997 traffic forecasts for the year 2010, that it is said that 351 billion traffic miles will be travelled. Even in 1996, the figure was 10 per cent. higher than it had been in 1990, with 275 billion vehicle miles being travelled.

The Government have wriggled away from signing up to the target that so many Labour Members put their names to in the relevant early-day motion. The Government realise that there is a large credibility gap between what the target implies and what can be achieved. I pay tribute to the Government, because there is and always has been a link between economic growth and traffic growth, as there is linkage between air traffic growth and economic growth. The Government's figures in the departmental report that was published before Easter show a 3 per cent. increase in road traffic in 1997, which means that an extra 9 billion vehicle miles were travelled compared with 1996.

We should compare that with what the Deputy Prime Minister said when launching the integrated transport consultation:

"We have to face up to the challenge of using the car less."

On 6 June, he said to *The Guardian*:

"I will have failed if in five years time there are not many more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order but I urge you to hold me to it."

On the basis of his progress in the first year, he must achieve a reduction of more than 1 per cent. in absolute terms in each of the remaining years of this Parliament to be able to avoid resigning, which he, as an honourable gentleman, would do if he failed to fulfil that commitment.

Perhaps reality is dawning on the Government. In Committee, why did the Minister refuse to accept the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not going to allow discussion of what was or was not accepted in Committee. We are having a Third Reading debate, and we shall speak only about the Bill.

Mr. Chope: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is significant that the hon. Member for Islington, North is not in the Chamber, because he was concerned about this issue. He wanted to set a much less ambitious but specific target that would have been implemented on 1 May 1997 and would have ended at the end of this Parliament. The Government rejected that suggestion. The hon. Member for Ceredigion thinks that the Government must have had good reason for that because they are committed to setting targets, but it is evidence that they are unwilling to introduce meaningful targets against which performance could be measured in the life of this Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) was absolutely right to say that the Bill would give the Government a cover story. A number of my right hon. and hon. Friends think that the Bill would do no harm, but I am concerned that it would provide cover for a significant reduction in investment in roads infrastructure. My hon. Friends have referred to road schemes and bypasses in their constituencies that would reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality in the towns and villages that were bypassed and thereby improve people's health, and contribute positively to road safety. Clause 2(3) mentions all those issues.

The Government have been cutting back significantly on investment in transport infrastructure. The latest Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions spending plans propose in the current year expenditure of £230 million less on national roads than was spent during the last year of the Conservative Government, which is a 15 per cent. cut. There has been a dramatic cut in expenditure on roads of more than local importance, which are often built around towns and villages where bypasses are most necessary.

This coming year, £376 million will be spent, compared with £558 million in the last year of the Conservative Government. That is a cut of no less than 33 per cent., and the report shows that only one new bypass will be started this year. That compares with the Conservative Government's record of starting many bypasses every year because of the tremendous demand and need for them.

Mr. Dawson: Would the hon. Gentleman care to consider Lancaster? It had a Conservative Member for 27 years and the Conservative Government were in office for 18 years and had no—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Christchurch will not consider Lancaster.

Mr. Chope: The previous Government completed 400 road schemes, and 160 major bypasses, during their term in office. I am sorry that they did not get around to completing all those that the hon. Gentleman thinks are needed in his constituency. They will not be completed by a Government who start only one bypass a year.

The Government are significantly cutting investment in transport infrastructure. It is estimated that the investment by local authorities in the coming year will be only £1.76 billion. The amounts are small compared with the £30 billion that the Government raised in revenue from road users this year. That makes me suspicious about whether the Government have it in their heart to take the measures necessary to reduce traffic congestion and improve the environment in many of our towns and villages.

The Government say that road traffic must be reduced, but they do not have a similar policy on air traffic, which is forecast to grow at about 5 to 6 per cent. a year between 1996 and 2015, with a consequent increase in use of fuel. The Government have no targets for reducing that, and when they were asked whether they intended to introduce a target, they said that they were developing a balanced package of measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, and expected all sectors to play their part.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Perhaps my hon. Friend would focus on clause 2(1), which states:

"It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State, subject to subsection (2) and with the aim of reducing the adverse environmental, social and economic impacts of road traffic, to set and publish . . . targets".

The Secretary of State has to consider the adverse impact of road traffic on towns and villages that so desperately need bypasses which, as my hon. Friend says, the Government are lamentably failing to provide?

Mr. Chope: I would not quarrel with my right hon. and learned Friend, because he knows the law and can interpret legislation, but clause 2(2) enables the Secretary of State to avoid complying with the requirements of subsection (1), which means that it will be possible for him to ignore the need for more bypasses.

The Minister for Transport in London has responded to a series of Adjournment debates in which hon. Members, including Labour Members, have sought investment in new bypasses. In none of her responses was there any sign that she was sympathetic to the building of bypasses as a means of reducing the adverse environmental impact of road traffic. She continues to speak about the need to reduce absolute levels of road traffic.

The problem is compounded by the point made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion, who said that we could not reduce the adverse impact of road traffic without reducing road traffic itself. Many Conservative Members think that we can reduce the its adverse impact by having road safety measures. Despite massive increases in road traffic, there are fewer deaths and serious injuries on the roads than when the statistics were first collected. In the one month of December 1939, no fewer than 1,000 people were killed on the roads. We can make improvements in safety without reducing overall road traffic. We can make improvements in emissions by using more environmentally friendly engines. The air quality targets published by the previous Government have shown that that can be achieved.

Noise is one of the environmental impacts that causes great concern to my constituents, and those of many others. Investment in the highways can significantly reduce the environmental impact of noise. If we invested more money in porous asphalt and other road surfaces, noise impact would be reduced. The key to reducing congestion is to remove bottlenecks, build bypasses and increase capacity. All those require investment and it is the investment side of the equation that the Government are not prepared to provide. That is why I come to this issue with quite a lot of scepticism and cynicism.

That cynicism has been increased significantly by the way in which the Government seem to be avoiding producing the working papers in support of "National Road Traffic Forecasts (Great Britain) 1997", which was published in October. Paragraph 2 of the introduction states:

"There are six working papers which will shortly become available."

They had not become available by the middle of March, so I asked a parliamentary question about what had happened to them.

The Minister for Transport in London responded:

"I understand that four of the six working papers will be available by the end of March, and that the remaining two will be available at end April".—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. *698*.]

In fact, one was available by the end of March and two were delivered two days ago. As we speak, three are still outstanding, including—interestingly, hon. Members may think—the one about forecasting uncertainty. It was promised originally that that would be one of the first papers to be delivered, but, for some reason, it has still not been released. If the Government are not able even to comply with their own targets for producing working papers in support of their documentation, how can we have any confidence that they will be able to produce meaningful targets for reducing the adverse impact of road traffic?

I am concerned that those documents have not yet been produced. Having looked at the ones that have been produced, one can see the chasm between the assumptions that lie behind the 1997 forecasts and the Government's language in addressing the issue of traffic and growth. Those forecasts show that, where gross domestic product increases, traffic will increase. They show that there will be a significant increase in population and households, and that household location will shift increasingly to the countryside. They show that that there will be an increase in fuel efficiency, but discount some of the Government's assumptions about the impact of land use planning.

Therefore, the Bill is a cover. It cannot disguise the fact that the Government are anti-car, rather than pro-environment. They support massively higher taxes on motorists, but are against investing the extra resource in the transport infrastructure-in just this financial year, 1998-99, £1.7 billion extra will be raised in taxes on the motoring public, but only £175 million will be re-invested in public transport.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington referred to the £500 million which the Chancellor played up in his Budget speech and said that it was only £475 million. He should have gone on to say that it is not even £475 million in one year, which is what we were led to believe—the Red Book shows that the £475 million is to be spread over two or three years.

The Red Book also shows that, this year, despite raising £1.75 billion extra tax from motorists, only £175 million—£1 in every £10—will be invested in public transport, and almost all of that will be absorbed by London Underground. Indeed, a significant amount of the money allocated to London Underground is being paid out in compensation because of a personality clash between its chairman and the Deputy Prime Minister.

This is a relatively harmless Bill. Doctors have a succinct phrase for relatively harmless medicine—placebos. The Bill will make the voter feel better, but it will not achieve anything of substance. I applaud the way in which my right hon. and hon. Friends have seen the Bill for what it is. We look forward to the Minister's response.

12.41 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): When the House last considered the Bill, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) threatened me with a venomous campaign. If that threat was delivered today, it carried all the serpentine terror of attack by slow-worm. The hon. Gentleman was confused about the Bill's purpose. I was surprised that he should be critical of the changes made in Standing Committee; he clearly does not believe in a Committee stage for Bills.

The hon. Gentleman was critical of the Government for cutting the road building programme. As he knows, the Government made a clear commitment in our election manifesto that we would work within the financial limits set by the Conservative Government, who consistently cut the road building programme.

It was interesting to discover that the hon. Gentleman is pro roads and believes that road building is the way out of the desperate congestion that costs this country

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

£20 billion a year. We have yet to tot up the environmental costs of the failure of successive Conservative Administrations even to begin to define an integrated transport policy. We now clearly know where the shadow Minister and the Conservative party are coming from—they believe in building more roads, and they do not believe in a Committee stage for Bills. They appear to think that safety levels will be increased by building more roads and that we can clean up our air by building more roads.

The country has reason to be grateful, on this and other matters, to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis), who has worked so closely with Friends of the Earth on the Bill. The country cannot continue as it is—there must be a reduction in road traffic. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generous words about me and, in particular, about my officials. His speech highlighted the importance of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the improvements that there will undoubtedly be in road safety, health, quality of life and the undoubted economic benefits that will flow from reducing what seems to be an almost unstoppable rise in the amount of traffic on our roads. It has been estimated that, without a drastic change in policies, at the present rate of increase there will be an additional 42 per cent. of vehicles on our roads by 2010. However, as the House knows, the Government have made it abundantly clear that we intend to change those policies. We are firmly committed to the creation of an integrated transport policy and have made it clear that our White Paper on that policy will be published shortly. We have also made it clear that we regard targets across a range of issues for which the Government are responsible as essential in delivering the policies we believe the people of this country wish us to pursue.

The issue of targets and the absence of a defined target in the Bill has been touched on by almost every hon. Member who has spoken this morning, but the hon. Member for Ceredigion made the point especially clearly. It is one thing to have a target; even more important is how one achieves it. He listed some of the measures available to local and central Government not only to achieve a reduction in the amount of traffic on our roads but to deliver the polices that we have pledged to deliver.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) gave the Bill a rather half-hearted welcome, but I know that, in the main, he supports the philosophy behind it. No one, either in or outside the House, doubts for a moment that any commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be kept. I regret that I cannot remember which Opposition Member referred to the Deputy Prime Minister wriggling on a hook. The idea that my right hon. Friend would wriggle in any situation is absurd, and the idea that any Opposition Member could catch him on a hook is equally absurd.

The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) made a particularly thoughtful, informed and constructive speech. He referred to the enormous increase in traffic caused by parents taking their children to school. I am sure that all hon. Members acknowledge that parents' concerns for their children—concerns that often necessitate their taking their children to school—are not related exclusively to the fear of road traffic accidents. There is undoubtedly a "stranger danger" element to parents' concerns.

The problem caused by the school run was also touched on by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who is a sponsor of the Bill. I reassure him and the hon. Member for Worthing, West that it is Government policy to reduce parents' dependence on cars to take their children to school. That is why the Government are engaged in a cross-party exercise, which will inevitably produce policy, involving my Department, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment. We hope not only to help local authorities but to define best practice on how to create safe routes so that there will be a reduction in the number of cars parked, often dangerously, outside school entrances. We want children to be given the freedom to walk and cycle, although we acknowledge that that can happen only when the routes are safe for them so to do.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) and the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) used this morning's debate to highlight particular constituency interests. Indeed, the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the necessity for a bypass for his constituency—not only in his speech but, if I have counted correctly, in at least four interventions on other hon. Members. He knows that the Government have been engaged in a thorough roads review since we took office. As I have said, our White Paper on integrated transport will be published shortly, and the roads review will follow soon after.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for dealing with the specific point that I raised. As I read it, the Bill encourages the Government to look at the environmental effects of bypasses in a constructive way rather than encouraging them not to build bypasses on the basis of a 1 per cent. overall reduction in road traffic. Does she agree with my interpretation?

Ms Jackson: The Government require no encouragement to examine the environmental aspects of all our policies. One of the first actions of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on taking office was to combine the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment. We have a clear commitment that environmental concerns must inform all our policy decisions. As I have said in the House, the specific environmental benefits of bypasses will be judged case by case against the Government's five criteria for new road building. The environment is central to those criteria.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) disputed not the legality, but the necessity, of Bills that, as he put it, were supported by single-interest groups, however well financed and popular. I found that somewhat surprising given the right hon. Gentleman's commitment to his own single-interest group—the Conservative party. I can understand his chagrin, because that single-interest group is markedly unpopular and less than well-financed and its last organised campaign, culminating on 1 May last year, received the most decisive rejection.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he had received few if any letters from constituents on the issue. That is hardly surprising if he is not prepared to support their concerns.

Mr. Nicholls: I also heard the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst

(Mr. Forth). My recollection is that he was saying that, because he wanted to serve his constituents, he would take care to find out what they all thought about an issue and not simply accept the word of a single-issue group.

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman's ears are as generous as he is himself. That is certainly not what I heard, but I would not argue with the hon. Gentleman's generous interpretation.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) gave the Bill a gentle welcome. He was particularly concerned that there should not be a broad-brush approach in defining targets for a reduction in road traffic numbers. The same concern was expressed by others, including the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) and the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) who put forward the undoubted case that there are variables across the United Kingdom, and specific conditions in rural areas.

There is no possibility that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would not take into account the major differences that often surprise me in a country as small as ours. The specific factors affecting particular areas will be considered in devising and defining the criteria that will have to be in place to produce a reduction in road traffic numbers in the best interests of all our citizens.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: There is a serious point to the Bill, which I am sure the Minister has studied carefully. Clause 2(3) is absolutely specific that, in considering matters relating to both clause 2(1) and 2(2),

"the Secretary of State shall have regard to the adverse impacts of road traffic"

in terms of

"congestion . . . danger to other road users; and social impacts."

What I want to know is whether the Government will abide by the law that they are helping to pass when considering bypasses.

Ms Jackson: By my reckoning, the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire has now raised to six his total number of references to bypasses during this morning's debate.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) also welcomed the Bill. He referred to certain fiscal issues, which are not for me. He also mentioned the changes that have taken place with regard to an employer in his constituency. The Government are encouraged by the way in which increasing numbers of employers are examining, and often setting in place, green transport plans, whereby they offer their employees alternatives to overdependence on the private car. The Government—and I, as the green Minister for my own Department—have issued advice to all Departments on creating green transport plans throughout Government.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) was highly critical of the Bill, saying that it was no more than posturing, but the form and content of his speech highlighted the truism that people who live in glass houses should never throw stones.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) discounted the value of private Members' Bills in general, and said that he believed that there was no need for legislation in this area. Had there not been legislation, it is highly unlikely that lives would have been saved by the introduction of, for example, seat belts in cars.

Mr. Blunt: That is obviously not what I said. Private Members' Bills are extremely valuable if they make an important contribution to the way in which we run our society, but this Bill will not change much at all. Does the Minister believe that the Bill will change the way in which she prepares and brings forward policies in her Department?

Ms Jackson: One of the reasons it was so easy for the hon. Member for Ceredigion and me to work well together is that so many of our policies enforce and enhance the central thrust of the Bill. No one had to change my mind about the value of the Bill.

Mr. Grieve: I had not intended to intervene, but just before my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) intervened, the Minister mentioned my constituency, but she did not go on to deal with the points that I raised in my speech. I wondered what she intended to say and whether she was going to say whether the Bill will help to hold the Government to account.

Ms Jackson: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. It was my understanding that, although he supported the Bill, he felt that Ministers needed to wake up to the reality of delivering targets and achieving traffic reductions. I do not believe that Ministers in the Labour Government need any waking up in that respect. As I said, one of the first actions of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was to combine the Departments of the Environment and of Transport. Issues relating to the environment, such as environmental protection and the environmental and economic need to create an integrated transport policy, are central the Government's policies. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will accept that as a sufficiently comprehensive answer at this stage.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire sees absolutely no value whatever in setting national targets. Not only we, but the previous Administration, set them for education, health and in an effort to reduce crime and to improve air quality. They form part of our commitments internationally and with our European partners.

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border expressed concern about a broad-brush approach in defining targets. He spoke of his constituents' dependency on the car because public transport had failed to meet their needs. He said that there had been only one bus in his constituency even before the Conservative Government deregulated buses—which, I should add, put many rural inhabitants in a more benighted position.

There used to be more local shops and services in rural areas but, as a result of the previous Administration's misguided policies over the past 18 years, those services have been stripped from village centres. The necessity in rural areas to travel has increased year on year, but a concomitant public transport service has not been provided.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): One of the finest manufacturers of buses is the Dennis company, which is based in my constituency. It attributes some of its tremendous success in recent years to the fact that the deregulation of the bus market opened up investment. Does the Minister acknowledge that market forces have a vital role to play in encouraging consumers back on to the buses, and that the innovation of companies such as Dennis has made it much easier for consumers to use buses?

Ms Jackson: I am delighted to hear that the bus industry in the hon. Gentleman's constituency is experiencing a marked upturn in investment. I have to say that that upturn has occurred only since 2 May—long may it continue.

I thank again the hon. Member for Ceredigion and all those within and without the House who have worked so tirelessly to support the Bill. We believe in the importance of road traffic reduction and of targets, which will show how the nation is progressing.

The Bill is a small measure—it cannot cover many of the issues that Conservative Members seemed to think it should—but it represents an important step, and could make a major difference to all the matters that have been mentioned today. I strongly commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Public Interest Disclosure Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

COMPENSATION FOR UNFAIR DISMISSAL

'.—(1) An employee whose dismissal is regarded as unfair under section 103A of the 1996 Act shall be entitled to compensation for unfair dismissal. The amount of compensation awarded by the tribunal shall consist of—

(a) the full amount of loss which, it appears to the tribunal, has been suffered by the employee; and,

(b) any punitive damages which the tribunal thinks appropriate in the circumstances.

(2) In determining the amount of compensation under section (1) the tribunal may reduce the award by such amount as the tribunal considers equates to the fault of the employee or to his failure to mitigate his loss.'.—*[Mrs. Gillan.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.2 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in clause 8, page 7, line 30, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 on page 8.

Mrs. Gillan: It gives me great pleasure to move new clause 1, which concerns an important aspect of the Bill—compensation for unfair dismissal. As I have not had the opportunity to speak on the Bill before, may I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box? I know that he has been burning the candle at both ends—indeed, rumour has it that he attended a £500-a-plate dinner at the Hilton last night. I hope that that will not slow his responses or dim his perception. The paucity of Labour Members present suggests that few survived last night, and the fact no Liberal Democrats are here to participate in what I believe to be an extremely important debate gives rise to the question of what they, too, were up to last night. I hope that the Minister, who has a pivotal role in the Bill, will listen carefully to the arguments this afternoon, and that my colleagues and I can persuade him of the merits of the new clause and of amendment No. 1.

I pay tribute to the work that has been conducted on this measure by Public Concern at Work, and I pay special tribute to Mr. Guy Deyn, who has provided advice to all parties involved in the Bill.

The matter of compensation for unfair dismissal was aired only briefly in Committee, when the Minister told us that he had already discussed the issue at length with my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—who is to be congratulated on bringing the Bill before us. That means that the discussions that have taken place between my hon. Friend—the Bill's promoter—and the Minister have taken place in private. Instead of questioning whether that is right, let me express the hope that, in his reply, the Minister will reveal the details of his apparent objections to the new clause and the amendment, not least in light of the fact that—as I believe the Minister has admitted—the majority of the organisations consulted on the Bill came down in favour of the unlimited compensation proposals.

The matter was discussed in greater detail in the previous Parliament, in 1996. If my memory serves me right, the Minister was involved in the proceedings on that occasion, and gave some indication that he supported such measures. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will tell us why he has apparently changed his mind. As he has changed the side of the House on which he sits, he has conveniently moved into another mode, now objecting to a measure that he purported to support when the previous Government were in office.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): When I respond to the new clause, I shall respond in kind to what the hon. Lady said about last night.

May I say that she has got the historical record completely wrong? The previous Government would not accept the proposals that were in the Bill; indeed, they scuppered it, and it has been left to the incoming Administration to sit down with Public Concern and hon. Members on both sides of the House to come up with a workable proposal. As the hon. Lady was involved in that Government, I assume that she wa party to the decision that scuppered the Bill in the previous Parliament.

Mrs. Gillan: I know that the Minister has had a heavy night but, if my memory serves me well from my reading of the report of the 1996 proceedings, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, said that he had no intention of scuppering the Bill. Moreover, a reading of the proceedings—you will correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker—reveals that the hon. Gentleman who is now the Minister was on his feet when the Bill ran out of time. I believe that the Minister is making a brave attempt on the morning after the night before, but I find it slightly incredible that he should try to use that argument at this stage, especially when I hope to persuade him of the merits of new clause 1 and amendment No. 1.

It may help the House if I give some background, especially to clause 8. Clause 8 provides that compensation for employees who have been dismissed for making a protected disclosure will be determined by regulations. That is the approach indicated in clause 4 for a worker who is disciplined or demoted, but not sacked. The worker will receive such compensation for his actual loss as is just and equitable. Where the worker has been at fault himself, or where he has failed to mitigate his loss, the award may be reduced. The awards for victimisation short of dismissal are subject to neither a minimum nor a maximum sum.

The Government's preferred approach appears to be that compensation for dismissal under the Bill should follow the precedent for health and safety representatives under the Employment Rights Act 1996, as the Minister has indicated. A sacked worker would receive his financial losses up to £11,300 plus, in exceptional cases, the penalty award of between £16,545 and £33,800. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills, in his magnificent tour de force in the hour-long Committee stage, certainly raised his concerns on the matter. There is still a great deal of doubt that what the Minister is planning will satisfy the Bill's supporters.

The Bill will not meet the actual losses of a higher-paid individual, or of the whistleblower who remains unemployed for several years after being dismissed. With the maximum, the Bill could have far less effect—for example, in the City. Cases such as that of BCCI, Barlow Clowes and the late Robert Maxwell's companies have been cited in support of the argument that we are making today. There may be natural reticence about providing employment to an individual involved in a high-profile case such as those I have mentioned.

Our proposals enjoy the support of the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the TUC. The Minister is aware that I have received a letter from Sarah Veale, the senior policy officer of the TUC. The House deserves the courtesy of hearing what the TUC has written about the matter. Ms Veale wrote that she noticed with interest the amendment on compensation tabled by my hon. Friends and me. She continued:

"As you may be aware, there is near-unanimous support across industry for compensation for unfair dismissal for public disclosure to be uncapped. We fully support your amendment. We believe that the employment tribunal should be able to assess compensation and damages according to their assessment of the loss suffered by the employee. This is how compensation is assessed in discrimination claims and, in our view, is how it should be assessed for all breaches of employment legislation. We have made our views on this clear to the Government and to the mover of the Bill".

That is not an ambiguous letter couched in half-hearted terms—it is an expression of full support. If the Minister cannot be persuaded by my argument—or by those which will be deployed by my hon. Friends in the debate—I hope that he will be fully persuaded by the TUC. If he is not, I would hope to be a fly on the wall at the next meeting between the Minister and the TUC general secretary, John Monks. I am sure that the TUC will have words to say if the Minister does not listen. The same view is held by the CBI and the IOD, and that shows that it is a reasonable measure.

The Minister will no doubt argue that his stance shows that he is not in the pockets of the unions. That would be a trivial response to a proposal that would make the difference to many people. It would strengthen the Bill and ensure that it has the effect that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills intended and that all right-minded employers and employees would wish it to have.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): The legislation is complex. The Bill, which would amend the 1996 Act, proposes that the Minister should have the power to make regulations under new section 127B. Has the Minister indicated to my hon. Friend what regulations he proposes to make? Would he make regulations that would render at large the amount of compensation that could be received by a whistleblower?

1.15 pm

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. and learned Friend is right to raise the issue. The answer is no, I have had no indication from the Minister. I did him the courtesy of discussing the matter briefly with him outside the Chamber before the debate. I hope that he retains an open mind. He gave me a mere glimmer of hope. We shall have to wait until he responds.

As with so much legislation, it seems that power is being retained by Ministers. Power is being held at the centre, giving Ministers much more control—whereas, in this case, it would be perfectly reasonable to devolve power to the tribunals, as we do with sex and race

[Mrs. Gillan]

discrimination cases. I live in hope that the Minister will be persuaded by my argument, and does not have a closed mind on the matter.

I shall not delay the House for too long. The new clause provides a greater incentive for well-paid employees—those arguably more likely to have access to potentially "blowable" information. It provides for a fair and just compensation award that recognises not only salary but the additional benefits. It passes discretion to the tribunal, which is fair and equitable.

In the light of the consensus of opinion among all the organisations that were consulted on the measure, I hope that the Minister will see that it is reasonable to accept the new clause. I shall listen carefully to the response.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Will my hon. Friend clarify one point about the new clause? As well as taking away a maximum limit of compensation which the Employment Rights Act 1996 included, it does away with the minimum amount that is in the Bill, as amended. Many people might be concerned that, if there was a minimum amount to be gained by blowing the whistle, perhaps unjustifiably, it would encourage dissident employees to make false allegations against their company, in the hope that they might make some money out of it.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The new clause removes that incentive, which might result in vexatious cases being brought.

I have taken enough of the House's time. I am keen to hear the Minister's response, but I know that many of my colleagues are keen to discuss this important matter and deploy further arguments. I shall listen carefully to the Minister.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am not sure that I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), and I am not sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) was right so readily to agree with him. The Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) makes it clear that those who make unjustifiable or malicious whistleblowing allegations will not be susceptible to the protection of the Bill, so I do not believe that the removal of the minimum will encourage people to make false accusations.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: The problem is that industrial tribunals attract a great deal of uncomplimentary publicity for the company that is accused. That company may instinctively pay out rather than face bad publicity and an inevitably one-sided report. I believe that some minimum would encourage people to bring cases before tribunals and encourage companies to give way to blackmail.

Mr. Garnier: I know where my hon. Friend is coming from, but I do not accept that that underscores his objection. Defendants who are relatively better off than the complainant bringing proceedings against them are always placed in the difficult position of having to decide whether it is commercially worth while to defend the action on its merits or whether it is better, on economic grounds, simply to pay the complainant to go away. Companies and better-off defendants currently face that problem with complainants who are on legal aid. The situation is no different in industrial tribunals, although I understand that no state assistance is provided for litigants on either side of the argument.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): May I put the point to my hon. and learned Friend in a different way? It will not always be a choice between no case on the one hand and an extremely blowable case on the other: there will be marginal cases. In those circumstances, employees may think that it is not worth the hassle bringing a case. However, if, on a balance of probabilities—my hon. and learned Friend may correct me if I have misremembered it—an employee can make the case stick and he wins £16,000 in one go, that will act as an incentive to take to tribunal the marginal cases that should never be heard.

Mr. Garnier: If that is my hon. Friend's argument, he should support our new clause, which will remove the minimum. If our new clause becomes law, anyone who puts a marginal case before the tribunal will recover rather less than the current minimum—indeed, he may recover a verdict but no reward. I do not know what cost penalty would be involved in those circumstances, but I think that the complainant would leave the tribunal hearing badly out of pocket, with his reputation as an honest broker somewhat impaired.

Mrs. Gillan: The issue is summed up partly by the comments of the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) in Committee. He said:

> "My concerns are that the minimum award of £16,545 would be made irrespective of any loss and thus may be made in circumstances in which the tribunal does not think it just. As such, it might encourage claims that, otherwise, would not be brought."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 11 March 1998; c. 13.]

That is a good summary of the Bill from the short Committee stage.

Mr. Garnier: I prefer to call the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills my hon. Friend. Although his name is not attached to our new clause, I think that he would support the general thrust of our arguments. We shall have to wait and see.

The Minister gave me some comfort in Committee when he referred to an increase in the current levels of compensation under the Employment Rates (Increase of Limits) Order 1998. He told the Committee that the new arrangements from 1 April this year will mean a basic award of £2,000—or what we would call nowadays four places at dinner—a compensatory award and a special award of £14,500. The Minister went on to say that there will be a maximum award of £220 multiplied by 30 weeks, which amounts to £6,600. A compensatory award of £12,000 will be added to that, together with a special award of £29,000. Therefore, under the current order, the total, maximum figure is £47,600. That is good news as far as it goes, because it increases—if only marginally—the levels of compensation available under the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The hon. and learned Gentleman should not be so derisory about the increase. He was a

member of a Government who refused to make any increases, and it was up to this Government to bring compensation in line with what is reasonable in today's marketplace. The hon. and learned Gentleman supported a Government who refused, year after year, to increase those limits.

Mr. Garnier: I am sorry if the Minister misunderstood me. He is being a little over-sensitive. I appreciate that he has had to wait a little before we reached this debate, but I was saying that I was pleased to note—that was the intention that I was trying to get across—that the order has increased the limit, but that the limit should be done away with altogether, so that people can be better and more adequately compensated for the losses that they suffer as a consequence of doing their public duty—exposing misdemeanours, crimes, breakdowns in health and safety, and so on, as set out in earlier clauses, which define a permitted disclosure.

I do not want to have a row with the Minister, as that would not be helpful, but if he would like one, we can arrange to have it in due course. For the moment, I shall concentrate on the merits or demerits of the arguments in favour of my new clause, which is supported by two of my hon. Friends.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) said, the Employment Rights Act 1996, which the Bill seeks to amend, is incredibly complicated. One has to look carefully at sections 117 to 127, which set out the compensation regime. One does not have to be a nuclear physicist—but quite close to it—to be able to devour all that and regurgitate it in a sensible form for a lay client.

The people who need advice under the Act will not necessarily be those most readily able to understand those sections. I dare say, but I may be completely wrong, that the category of person we are seeking to protect may be somewhat different. It is likely to be those who have deliberately decided to expose something that they think is wrong rather than the unwitting victim of bad conduct by an employer, be it a commercial concern or an individual.

I suspect that the individuals we are seeking to protect are better equipped to understand the sections to which I referred, and may be in the higher income brackets. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills, who is promoting the Bill, is not doing so to protect one economic class. I have never heard him suggest anything of that sort. That is not how he thinks or works. However, it is inevitable that we shall disfranchise quite a cohort of people who earn rather more, or who stand to lose rather more, than the current maximum under the order, which was sensibly increased by the Minister the other day.

There will be a huge number of people—in the health service, local and central Government, as well as in the City, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham made clear—who earn the £47,000-odd maximum in a week or two. I regret to say that I do not. They will be disinclined to expose wrongdoing, in the City or in other areas where high salaries exist, because of the relatively low limits provided in the order.

I have a horror of government and legislation by regulation. I prefer those enactments to be on the face of the Bill, but that is another week's work. I see that the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) is keeping a close eye on me, so I shall be careful in what I say. In common law, in actions for breach of contract or wrongful dismissal, there are areas available to a complainant or plaintiff that would allow higher awards for damages. If translated into the Bill, they would allow the tribunal to give a fairer assessment of the loss to the unfairly dismissed complainant in the event of his being in need of compensation.

1.30 pm

Some employees who are dismissed for whistleblowing may be fortunate enough, because of the publicity surrounding the way in which they made the disclosure, to be re-employed pretty quickly. Let us take the example of someone working in the national health service who exposes misconduct by a consultant or a department in a hospital, who as a result of that disclosure receives tremendous publicity in the newspapers. Much of that publicity will denigrate the person who made the disclosure for speaking out of turn. No doubt that person and his or her family will have to undergo the most appalling public criticism from some for letting the employer down or letting the side down and not being a team player.

On the other hand, there will be another group of people whose views will, no doubt, be reflected in and approved by the media. They will applaud the person for exposing a particular wrong or a series of examples of misconduct. Given that treatment in the public prints, it may be that the person concerned will attract employment from another employer in the health world, perhaps in the private sector, which means that he will not lose as a consequence of having lost his previous employment. In such cases, the money question does not bite.

I am mindful of the strict laws in Switzerland that apply to telling tales out of school, which mean that an employee can be dismissed summarily without compensation, as I understand them. The chances of such a person being re-employed in Switzerland, in the financial sector or in any other economically meaningful sector there are pretty small, if not impossible.

Hon. Members will no doubt recall the case in Switzerland two or three years ago of a man who was eventually driven to suicide by his inability to come to terms with his failure to be re-employed. He felt that he had let his family down by exposing them to penury. In some senses, it was felt that he had let his country down by talking out of turn.

I produced that case to simplify my argument, but given that extreme case, I suggest that the Bill, as drafted, does not assist very much. A man on a basic salary of £100,000, who may be entitled to bonuses—they are not unheard of in the City, even under a new Labour Government—of £200,000, £300,000, £400,000 or £500,000, in addition to share options, private medical health insurance and other perks such as cheaper mortgage rates or subsidised mortgage rates, will find it extremely difficult to work out where his best interests lie.

Would that person's interests lie in public disclosure, following a proper assessment of his public duty, in relaying to the proper recipient of information the fact that some wrongdoing, fraud or misconduct is taking place within his firm or within the sector of the City with which he is concerned, or would he say, "There is no point, no

[Mr. Garnier]

matter how bad I feel about it and no matter how bad I think what I know is—I'm not going to give up my package of half a million pounds for maximum compensation of a little under £50,000"? It would be unrealistic to expect that to happen.

One or two public-spirited people—not the majority—would cast aside thoughts of the likely compensation, either because they are independently well off or because they have made arrangements to meet their family's commitments. The compensation levels in the Bill would discourage public-spirited, law-abiding people from coming forward to give a good account to the proper authorities of what has happened, so that the public would be better protected from misdeeds in high places or in places to which they do not usually have access.

My next point concerns another aspect of the common law. Again, I look to the hon. Member for Dudley, North—I hope that I do not embarrass him by saying that he is a noted commercial lawyer—to discover whether I am right that the courts can take into account loss of reputation as a consequence of unfair dismissal.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire will remember from law school the case concerning Addis *v.* the Gramophone Company, from which an employee was dismissed in humiliating circumstances. In 1909, the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords decided that, even though he was dismissed in abhorrent and objectionable circumstances that struck at his reputation, he could not recover damages under the unfair dismissal claim for the increased hurt to his feelings caused by the manner in which he was dismissed.

We must distinguish between feelings and reputation. A man's reputation can be destroyed by being sacked for whistleblowing perfectly properly and in the public interest, and the tribunal should take into account the damage to his reputation in his sector of employment. In the City, for example, trust and financial confidentiality are important. A stockbroker, banker or dealer may be thought by his peer group to have gone outside regimental ethics and breached—properly, in one sense, but improperly in the in-house sense—the parameters within which such matters are considered in the industry.

Such a person should be compensated, or the court should at least have available to it a means of compensating him for the additional injury to his reputation. As a consequence of going outside the laager and speaking against his colleagues, even though some of them may grudgingly admire him, such a person would never get a job in that sector again.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am most grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for referring to the common law position, which is confined to the damages that are relevant to the notice period, which may be two years or six months, or even a week or a month. The sum would be modest. The question is whether someone who, in the public interest, puts at risk his future livelihood and ability to work again should be confined to compensation under employment rights legislation. The first step was taken by Lord Howe with the 1971 industrial relations legislation, which is relevant to the debate.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Eccles): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman is a well-known joker, and I invite my right hon. and learned Friend not to give way to him, because I am still on my feet.

I entirely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend, and I draw to his attention a paragraph from a textbook with which he is familiar—"McGregor on Damages". The paragraph states:

> "Injury to reputation stands on a slightly different footing from injury to feelings. In so far as the injury to reputation results in a non-pecuniary loss it is irrecoverable, as is the non-pecuniary loss from the injury to feelings, but it is possible that the injury to reputation may cause pecuniary loss if it causes the plaintiff to have more difficulty in obtaining new employment."

That is broadly what I was saying before my right hon. and learned Friend intervened.

I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills and the Minister to take a view on the matter. We are debating an area of public and private conduct in which the reputation of a person is at stake. If, as a consequence of doing their public duty, people lose everything, it would be unjust for the courts not to provide on behalf of the House a proper way to compensate them at a proper level.

Mr. Stewart: I have tried not to intervene on the hon. and learned Gentleman, because I know that he is sincere. However, it is a bit rich for Opposition Members to show such concern for a section of the work force that is in a high wage bracket. I remind the hon. and learned Gentleman that his Government removed protection from millions of workers, by raising the qualifying period for industrial tribunals from six months to two years.

Perhaps I could put the matter in context. Since the industrial tribunals legislation was implemented, less than 25 per cent. of applicants have been successful, and the average award has been of hundreds rather than thousands. Opposition views would be more appropriate if the previous Government had shown for low-waged people who were unfairly dismissed the sympathy that the hon. and learned Gentleman expresses for higher-waged people.

Mr. Garnier: As the hon. Gentleman is an experienced and respected trade union official in the north-west, his comments are not surprising. I wish that he could make them to the previous Government but, sadly, they are the previous Government and there is nothing that I can do about that, much as I regret their demise. I advise the hon. Gentleman to visit the Vote Office and look at section 108 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, because in that he may find one or two words of comfort.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is not a question of sympathising with high wage earners who have much to lose if they blow the whistle? As he says, unless the matter is dealt with, they will not make use of the legislation and of the good intentions and consensus in the House. The debate is not about sympathy but about the legislation having practical effect.

Mr. Garnier: I agree with my hon. Friend. Wages have increased tremendously over the past 25 to 30 years, and many traditional Labour supporters—this is not a party political point—such as head teachers and nurses, whose salary of £46,000 may not be reflected in the maximum under the order, stand to lose much more than that over time.

It does not matter whether one is a coil winder earning £200 a week or the international chief executive of Megaton plc. What they have to consider is what they will lose if they tell the truth about what is going on. If they are going to be compensated only up to a maximum of £46,000, £47,000 or £48,000, whichever the exact figure is, it will not encourage a head of a big comprehensive, a senior or even junior nurse, a general practitioner, or a middle manager in a factory in the constituency of the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Stewart), still less one of his most ill-paid employees, so I ask him to bear it in mind that we are talking about just compensation for the total loss. We are not talking about comparing annual salaries, although, obviously, it is useful to bear them in mind.

I shall sit down at this point, because I should like other hon. Members to address the House on this important matter.

1.45 pm

Mr. Nicholls: When I came to this, I thought that it was a slightly strange debate because, although my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) made the point that the Bill had been discussed exhaustively in Committee, it has not been exhaustively discussed on the Floor of the House. As I recollect, Second Reading went ahead on the nod.

Mrs. Gillan: The point that I was trying to make was that the Bill had not been extensively discussed. It has had only one hour in Committee, and it went through on the nod on Second Reading. I am sad that we have not been able to debate the Bill at more length, because it is of great significance.

Mr. Nicholls: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The fact that the debate seemed to take on a slightly Second Reading hue was in some ways inevitable, bearing it in mind that the broad principle of the Bill has not been discussed. That is slightly unusual. It must have happened before, but I cannot immediately recollect it. A detailed Committee discussion has taken place even though the broad merits of the Bill have not been debated on Second Reading.

I always find that the Bills introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) are usually well worth having a look at and supporting, but something troubled me about this Bill. I do not know whether I am alone in saying that I felt slightly queasy about it until I started to examine the detail and to think about it.

I suppose old habits die. I said to myself, "Are we legislating for a sneak's charter?" Are we in the business of encouraging difficult troublemakers, the awkward squad, who exist in any organisation, by almost giving them financial incentives to behave in a way that many of us would find unattractive?

To be fair, I do not think that that is correct, even if the Bill comes across that way to begin with. Reference has been made to some of the more famous cases where whistleblowers have been ruined. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) reminded us of the case in Switzerland in which an employee was literally ruined—by the sound of it, unto death—because he had had the courage to come out and talk about the corruption in his organisation.

We have not yet heard anyone say—perhaps because we have not had many contributions from Labour Members; I look forward to hearing them—that it is wrong to compensate, and that, if something is right, one should come out and do it. That is marvellous stuff for us to say on the Floor of the House and sounds very noble, but, frankly, it does not matter whether someone is earning £200, £2,000 or £20,000 a week.

During the course of a relatively long life, I have never met anyone who did not have any trouble living up to their income level. Whistleblowers have to contemplate taking a decision that could wreck not only their lives, but those of their wives and children. Therefore, if we are going to ask someone virtually to make the supreme gesture by coming out, taking their chance before a tribunal and perhaps making themselves unemployable—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has reminded the House that this is not a Second Reading debate. I should be grateful if he would try to confine his remarks to the new clause and the amendment.

Mr. Nicholls: The point that I was going to make was simply this. If someone is going to do that, compensation must have some relevance. I look forward to hearing from the Minister when he replies. I do not see what the argument is for not removing the minimum and for not ensuring at least that the tribunal or whatever body is used has the discretion to make up its mind at what level it should compensate.

The minimum payment may not be the most important aspect of the new clause, but it is important. I cannot see any reason for a minimum payment. Having been both an employer and employee, I can see every possible argument for not making it possible to win a big prize with a technical victory, and I am sure that that was not the intention. It is one of the matters that might have come out in a Second Reading debate. However, as things stand, we could be looking at that scenario.

There will be marginal cases. A responsible, prudent person might go to his employer and say, "I am extremely unhappy about this situation. It may not be desperately important, but it is not right and something should be done about it." That would be a relatively low-key case. It is wrong to have as an alternative simply going down to the tribunal to win a quick prize of £16,545 minimum.

In the past, I have criticised decisions taken by the judiciary and by lawyers. However, I have enough confidence in the tribunal system to want it to decide what the level of compensation should be. A minimum payment does not have a part in that.

Let us examine the case—which the new clause reflects—for saying that there should not be a maximum payment of £45,000 or thereabouts. What will be the effect if the Bill passes into law but the new clause fails? The legislation will not be used. It actually reads better

[Mr. Nicholls]

than the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, which we debated earlier. It is extraordinary that this Bill could turn out to be just as useless. I do not think that any of us wants that. There is a consensus that legislation is necessary, that we have learnt by events that it is necessary, and that we want to make it work. If a maximum payment is imposed, the Bill will not work.

Implicit in all that—my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough touched on this—is that, when a tribunal comes to consider a major whistleblowing case, it must have the ability to consider all the consequences. Let us take the case of someone on a substantial financial package, with free health care and so on—a major amount of money being put at risk. If that person had detected, for example, fraud in a merchant bank, in an ideal world all the other merchant banks would say, "That's marvellous; that's a very honest chap—let's have him in our organisation." And pigs may fly.

I suspect that, when someone goes in for a major whistleblowing exercise, whether aged 20, 40, 50 or 65, the reality is that he will probably never work again. We are expecting people to take the chance of litigation and put their reputations heavily under threat. Let us be fair—tribunals and courts can be quirky, so people have to face the fact that they might lose. Therefore, we must at least give the tribunal the opportunity to consider the possibility that the person may never work again.

I do not make light of the fact that, when we hear some of the figures being bandied about, it is tempting to say, "It's all very well for those earning a lot, but if you're only on 200 quid a week it might look different." It is not a question of that—we want the Bill to succeed; we want people to use it. However, we do not want to give people an artificial incentive to use it. That is why having a minimum payment would be utterly wrong.

We have to face the fact that the people who will use the legislation may lose everything. They will be putting their reputations on the line. They will have to face the fact that they may never be employed again. That is precisely the type of issue that might have arisen on Second Reading, and it has not been thought through properly.

I have deliberately kept my remarks brief because I know that some of my hon. Friends want to speak, and I cannot imagine that some Labour Members would not wish to contribute. When the Minister replies, I hope he will say that, no matter how he feels about the drafting, if the Bill is to succeed, it has to be useable. Without the new clause, it might just as well stay on the lawyers' shelf because, for all the use that it will be put to, that is where it will belong.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I congratulate the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on the progress that he has made so far, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) and others. My Department is also grateful for the help provided by the charity Public Concern at Work.

A good Bill has been improved in Committee, and I look forward to further progress being made today to ensure that, after many years of campaigning in and outside the House, with a great deal of support from the business community, from organisations that represent workers and from academia, we can at last put in place legislation to protect people who, until now, have suffered greatly for having the guts and integrity to put in the public domain things that would otherwise have remained secret. Because there has been no protection for such people, they have often suffered detriment to their health and their career. The Government strongly support the Bill, but I cannot accept the new clause.

Like the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) I enjoyed a meal last night. We shared a taxi—I went to one very expensive hotel and she went to another. I enjoyed every morsel of my meal as I sat back, enjoying the celebration of the first year of the Labour Government—and what a year it has been for employment rights and the changing nature of British society.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the Minister for revealing our travelling arrangements to the rest of the world. I believe that my dinner was more enjoyable because I was learning about the pharmaceutical industry, not paying £500 towards Labour party funds.

Mr. McCartney: That probably means that the hon. Lady did not pay for her meal at all. Never mind, I am sure that she enjoyed not only the discussion but the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who, in the first year of the Labour Government, is proving to be the most successful Secretary of State for Health, since the creation of the national health service. I am pleased that, although the hon. Lady did not have the opportunity to celebrate new Labour, she was able to celebrate the new NHS under new Labour.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford) *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: I have hardly started, but I shall give way.

Mr. St. Aubyn: It is not strictly relevant, but perhaps the Minister could clarify his comment. Is he praising the Secretary of State for Health for the fact that waiting lists have increased by nearly 100,000 since Labour came to power?

Mr. McCartney: I am praising my right hon. Friend for getting rid of the Conservatives' plans to privatise the national health service and for putting millions of pounds into the service. We are reducing waiting lists—indeed, 18-month waiting lists have gone, ahead of schedule. By the next election, we shall have a health service of which the country will be proud.

My right hon. Friend has had a role to play in tackling the problems facing whistleblowers. One of his first actions as Secretary of State for Health was to remove the previous Government's gagging clause on doctors and nurses, clauses that led to the sacking of Graham Pink and the destruction of his career. The previous Government wanted to silence his criticism of the NHS under the Tories, so we shall take no political lessons from them.

I hope that our debate on the Bill will take the same approach as the Government. Along with the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, Members of all political persuasions want to see the Bill—

Mrs. Gillan: On the statute book.

2 pm

Mr. McCartney: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Obviously I got to bed later than she did.

Compensation under the Bill will be determined by secondary legislation. However, it is our view that compensation should be based on remedies available under existing employment legislation. After all, the Bill is an employment measure.

We believe that compensation limits generally should be increased in line with inflation. Indeed, we recently announced increases with effect from 1 April this year. In the longer term, we shall want to consider whether the limits and arrangements for reviewing compensation work in the best way to achieve fair minimum standards and a competitive business environment.

I know that the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills has had discussions with the banking sector in respect of third-party disclosure. It is certainly not the intention that, where a bank has acted diligently, it should be liable for a breach of confidence claim by a client when a bank employee has made a public interest disclosure.

I understand that one of the reasons behind the new clause is that higher earners should be properly compensated if they blow the whistle. To limit compensation would prevent that. As hon. Members will be aware, the Government favour following the compensation model currently available for health and safety disclosure. Contrary to apparently popular belief, the sums available in such cases are by no means insignificant. Where someone is dismissed unfairly and does not get his job back despite a re-employment order having been made, the compensation is based on three times annual salary. So while someone on average earnings of £368 a week could receive more than £57,000, someone on £1,500 a week could receive £234,000 and those earning the equivalent of £1 million a year—such as the individuals that have been mentioned in the debate—could receive £3 million in compensation. In the case mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who is no longer in his place, the compensation would be £1.5 million.

Therefore, the proposal before the House is not insignificant, and potentially takes into account the earnings levels of all those—low, average and high earners—who could be covered by the Bill. There is no cause for concern or worry among hon. Members or those outside the House that the Government's intention is any different from that of the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills and his supporters—to put in place a compensation regime that takes into account the losses that people may suffer if they lose their employment as a result of having acted within the context of the legislation.

I hope that my assurances and the figures that I have provided in respect of the Government's intentions will make it possible for the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham and her hon. Friends to withdraw the new clause so that we can proceed a little further towards ensuring that the Bill reaches the statute book. From that moment onwards, there will be legislation to ensure people in Britain who have the courage and commitment to enter the public domain to assist the public will not suffer the same disadvantages as they do now.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I shall not detain the House long. I do not often agree with Labour Members, and I have some reservations about the full scope of the new clause. My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) warned against creating a nark's charter. The unfortunate and no doubt unintended consequence of the new clause might be to create a super-nark's charter.

Some months ago, we had a debate on industrial tribunals in which I made the point that it is important to set a limit on compensation in cases of dismissal because, without such a limit, the position of smaller businesses could be extremely vulnerable. In cases arising under the Bill where a small business has committed some misdemeanour, justice may not be served if that firm is exposed to the risk of a high level of damages being awarded to a former employee. The situation might not be black and white, or the former employee might have a private agenda in bringing the company's wrongdoing to the authorities' attention. If the court is obliged to consider the full financial consequences for the former employee in an extremely favourable light, the balance might swing in favour of the employee, at the expense both of the firm and of the other people whom that firm legitimately employees.

The House should be cautious about agreeing to amendments that allow for unlimited compensation for former employees. We heard from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) of the plight of formerly well-paid ex-employees. One reason why those in the City are paid handsome compensation for the time and effort that they give to their employers is that they often do not expect to be in such lucrative employment for very long. One of the risks of their job is that, if they simply make a bad call on the market, demand for the services rapidly diminishes. The fact that such an employee may, as a result of exercising his or her conscience—something that many would do in any event—suffer some financial loss is part of the risks and rewards they accept when they go to work in such a high-risk environment.

Many such employees will have planned to use the generous remuneration that they receive during their years working in that world to go and do something else quite different when they leave. I believe that, in one case, a trader at a large American bank who had been earning tens of millions of year decided to become a Catholic priest at the age of 35. We cannot predict what such employees will do, but we can state, based on that case, that they have a conscience and that they do not need money to be persuaded to exercise it.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I shall be able to keep my remarks brief, as many of the points I wanted to cover have been raised by my hon. Friends. We are dealing with the integrity of our financial markets and financial institutions. The new clause would cover some of the highest-paid employees in financial institutions, and, if the Bill is to be effective in the City of London, we must accept it.

BCCI and Barlow Clowes have already been mentioned; I would add Barings and, from the United States and Japan, Drexel Burnham Lambert and The Sumitomo Trust and Banking Company, whose activities extend to this country. A catastrophic disaster beset Barings, but it is possible that certain people within Barings knew what Nick Leeson was doing. If the Bill,

[Mr. Robert Walter]

with the new clause in it, had been in force at that time, they might have been prepared to blow the whistle earlier and, in so doing, save Barings from disaster.

Mr. St. Aubyn: In the case of Barings, people did indeed know—but did not understand—what was going on in Singapore. The problem was one of comprehension. Many of those who knew what was going on would certainly have had an interest in bringing it to the attention of management if only they had understood it.

Mr. Walter: I do not want to enter into a lengthy debate about what happened at Barings, but I suspect that some people preferred their bonuses to be looked after by Mr. Leeson than to blow the whistle.

The financial markets, especially in the City of London, have the highest integrity and command the highest respect in the world. We continue to set high standards for them—through the Financial Services Authority, for example. If those institutions are not to be brought into disrepute—or brought down—by the occasional rogue, we must ensure that people can blow the whistle when they see wrongdoing, so I believe that we should incorporate the new clause and the amendment into the Bill.

Mrs. Gillan: We have had a long debate on the new clause and the amendment, and I should say now that I do not intend to speak on Third Reading, as I am conscious that time is pressing and I want the Bill to be enacted.

I hope that the Bill will act as a deterrent to employers who might be minded to rely on the inaction of their employees in the face of malpractice. I hope, too, that it will reassure employees that they will not be victimised if they speak out on good grounds. I believe that it will make a positive contribution to the means available to combat fraud—it should be welcomed.

I am very disappointed with the Minister's response to the new clause. His wits have obviously been dulled by the events of last night, as he has not been persuaded by the powerful arguments of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) and my hon. Friends the Members for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) and for North Dorset (Mr. Walter).

I am sad that, as time is pressing, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has not been able to contribute to the debate, but I hope that common sense will prevail when the Bill is considered further, especially in another place. It is not often that a Minister stands out against a measure that is recommended by the Institute of Directors, the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress, all the other parties that were consulted and the majority of hon. Members—it is a brave Minister who stands like a little terrier guarding his hole. I know that I shall not persuade the Minister—he has dug his little heels in, which is a great shame—but in the greater interests of the Bill, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 11

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 8, line 29, leave out from beginning to end of line 32 and insert—

"'(4) Part IVA and sections 47B and 103A do not have effect in relation to categories of employment and certain employees employed in the security service, the Secret Intelligence Service or the Government Communications Headquarters, in respect of which there is in force a certificate issued by or on behalf of a Minister of the Crown certifying that employment of a description specified in the certificate, or the employment of a particular person so specified, is (or at a time specified in the certificate, was) required to be excepted from those provisions for the purpose of safeguarding national security.".'.

I suspect that, in the time available, we shall not be able to do justice either to this important amendment or to amendment No. 3, which concerns the police service. The Government would be wise to accept the amendments when they are given more attention in another place—the Minister should not believe everything that his Department is told by other Whitehall Departments about the absolute need to give the security services everything for which they ask.

The amendment would bring some security service employees in from the cold and in to the warmth and shelter of the Bill. It would cover the non-operational employees of the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service and Government communications headquarters. It would not cover operational members, but I want to ensure that office cleaners or messengers, for example, in the security services, who do not deal with sensitive matters of national security, can pop up and blow the whistle—without affecting national security—on appalling waste, maladministration or a member of the service who buys a desk as expensive as that of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

When blanket official secrets coverage is given to every person working in the security services, some non-operational failures are covered up—the price of the privilege is also that the security services cannot talk about their successes. There is no reason in the world why failures of office management and resource management in the secret services should not be aired. They have survived public revelations, decades ago, that they were thoroughly penetrated by Soviet agents, and I expect the services to survive some public and semi-public whistleblowing on day-to-day, routine blundering.

It is not good enough for the secret services to argue, "It is national security; we do a terribly important job; we must have carte blanche coverage." That argument has not been accepted by the House in recent years, and I suggest to the Minister that the Department of Trade and Industry should not accept that argument now that it is being used by the Foreign Office and the Home Office to persuade the DTI that their secret service agencies and everyone in them—not just some categories of employee—should be exempt.

2.15 pm

I could say much more, but I shall curtail my remarks. I simply point out to the Minister that the Official Secrets Act 1911 already ring-fences the vital topics that are properly within the scope of national security. In 1989, to

produce the latest revision of the Official Secrets Act, the House did much work on and debated at length what is and what is not, in essence, a state secret. The purpose of that work was to determine who should, and who should not, be prosecuted under the Act. I believe that we can capitalise on that work and apply it to the Bill.

The Official Secrets Act 1989 defines as secret any official information to do with

"security and intelligence, defence or international relations"

and information obtained in confidence from other states, or from international organisations. It also includes information likely to result

"in the commission of an offence"

or likely to impede

"the prevention or detection of offences"

and

"special investigations under statutory warrant"

such as interception of communications.

Those categories are widely drawn—some would say so widely drawn that they almost restore the catch-all nature of previous versions of the Act. In any case, we can confidently say that everything important to national security is protected and that the Bill does not protect anyone who breaks the Official Secrets Act because it is part of the criminal law. I argue that any revelations that are not caught by the Official Secrets Act are fit and proper to come under legislation to shelter legitimate whistleblowers.

I do not blame the Minister, because probably he was not anticipating this in Committee, but I am afraid that we did not hear an adequate explanation from the Government, in Committee, of why every person in the Security Service, the SIS and GCHQ, whether or not they were dealing with state secrets, should be protected.

I understand perfectly why those services are protected. It is usual for them to say to the Home Office and the Foreign Office, "Get us exemption from the Bill: we are the Security Service; we should be exempt," and most Departments believe it.

The Minister should tell the Cabinet Committee about today's debate and say that if there is to be any hope of the Bill passing through the other place, the Home Office and the Foreign Office must get back to the SIS, the Security Service and GCHQ and tell them, "Give us genuine reasons for exempting your whole service—or rely on the certification procedure suggested by the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean)."

Mr. Ian McCartney: I hope that my response to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) will be positive and proactive. We must wait and see whether it is adequate to enable him to withdraw his amendment—or to withdraw it so that he may fight another day.

The amendment is unnecessary and would have no practical effect. I am sure that hon. Members agree that national security cannot be compromised. The agencies to which clause 11 and amendment No. 2 relate deal with highly sensitive information, the disclosure of which would greatly damage national security. The Government have recognised the special position of those agencies in our proposals for a freedom of information Bill, from which they are to be excluded. Anyone who works in them could have access to sensitive information, even when that is not part of their main duties. The ethos of these agencies is secrecy, and blowing the whistle to an outsider is contrary to that ethos.

I agree that it would be unacceptable if employees of the agencies enjoyed lesser protection than other employees where there was no good reason for it. That is why one of the first steps the Government took after coming to office was to restore the right of trade union membership to employees of GCHQ, which was withdrawn by the previous Government—of which the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border was a prominent member for many years. The right hon. Gentleman was a Minister of State at the Home Office and other Departments with sensitive information.

The previous Government prosecuted and tried to gaol civil servants who blew the whistle—remember Clive Ponting and Sarah Tisdall? The previous Government tried at every opportunity to gag members of the civil service and trade unionists to prevent their putting into the public domain on occasions legitimate information. I take with a large bag of salt the case put by the right hon. Gentleman this afternoon in respect of his conversion to openness in government and the protection of employment rights in the civil service, or for those who work for the Government at various levels outside the civil service.

It is not the case that workers in the agencies will have no means of expressing legitimate concerns. They will be able to raise them under well-established internal procedures. If an intelligence agency employee believes that his or her concerns are not being adequately dealt with, they can raise the matter with the staff counsellor, who has a broad remit across the three security agencies—GCHQ, the Security Service and the Secret Intelligence Service—and can act quickly and effectively to resolve any concerns that may be raised. In addition, there are internal disciplinary, security and audit procedures that can be used to investigate possible illegalities and problems.

Furthermore, all Crown servants are subject to the Crown Office guidance document "Giving Evidence or Information about Suspected Crimes". Taken together, these procedures provide the type of safeguard that will encourage people in the security services to raise matters of concern in a responsible manner, consistent with the aims of the Bill. I therefore ask the right hon. Gentleman if he will be kind enough to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Maclean: I am disappointed that the Minister has not satisfied me on this. I recognise some of the arguments—I used them repeatedly over the years when I was arguing measures in the Home Office. His argument will be successful today as I shall not push the amendment to a vote and risk losing an important Bill, but the answer he has given today—that the security services must be exempt from everything—will not satisfy the other place. Nevertheless, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 13

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. Maclean: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 8, line 39, leave out from beginning to end of line 4 on page 9.

[Mr. Maclean]

I wish to speak for no more than two minutes on the amendment. We are led to believe that the Bill has not been extended to cover police officers because the Home Office is working on new procedures to obtain openness and accountability in police forces. That is all very well, but it is not a reason in itself to cold-shoulder the police from the benefits of the Bill. When the Home Office gets round to that review—I have not checked, but this must be the 20th or 30th Home Office review—it may come up with procedures, but that is no reason why the police cannot be included in the Bill.

I want to impress on the House the value of police officers having the same rights and procedures available to them as civilians. If the Minister does not want to believe me, he may believe the chief constable of Sussex who, I believe, is head of the Association of Chief Police Officers committee in charge of public information. He said:

"I was surprised to see that it is proposed to exclude police officers. I find this puzzling, since police support staff who may well have access to the same information will not be excluded."

The same argument applies to the secret services. The chief constable continued:

"If I take my own case as a police officer, I would be excluded from the provisions of the Bill, but my personal assistant, who has access to all the information that I do, will be protected by it. I believe that this is wrong. This association has taken a very firm stance in seeking to emphasise the need for integrity in police operations and honesty among all staff in the police service. Police forces have nothing to fear from malpractices being revealed. In fact, the contrary is the case—that chief officers of police need to know where corrupt and improper practice is going on so that they may tackle it as soon and as effectively as possible."

In another place, the Minister should look favourably on including the police service, because it wants to be included in the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The amendment is unnecessary. The Government gave an absolute commitment in Committee and outside the Committee to the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and the sponsors of the Bill that the police regulations will provide protection equivalent to that in the Bill. That has been welcomed. There will be no disparity in the treatment of police officers, or in their capacity to whistleblow in the circumstances set out in the Bill.

Police officers are office-holders and are subject to a separate regulatory regime. With the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), we are working to bring the two regimes into an interlocking arrangement to ensure that police officers will be protected to the full if they put information into the public domain.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept those assurances. As a former Minister of State in the Home Office, he will understand the steps that my hon. Friend is taking to ensure that the regulations are upgraded. Those regulations were introduced by the right hon. Gentleman. It seems that he did not quite get it right, but I give a commitment that this Government will get it right. In the relationship between the police force and the Home Office, police officers will have proper and adequate protection.

Mr. Maclean: I was confident that the regulations were right when they were introduced. They can always be added to, and no doubt improved. The Bill would give better protection than police regulations, but I was not convinced at all by the Minister's argument. I know that the other place will not be convinced either, but for reasons that I think the House will understand, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

2.26 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I wish to thank many people, honourable citizens in the House and without the House, and the Department of State.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Waste Minimisation Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

POWER OF CERTAIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO TAKE STEPS TO MINIMISE GENERATION OF HOUSEHOLD, COMMERCIAL OR INDUSTRIAL WASTE

2.27 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 18, at end insert

'and shall also consult those whom the authority believes are the principal generators of controlled waste.'.

The promoter of the Bill, the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith), was kind enough to tell me that, although she was tempted to accept the amendment, she was unable to do so. Without embarrassing anybody, I assume that the Government had concluded that they could not accept my amendment. I regret that.

The amendment merely invites the Government—although it would put an obligation on the Government—to consult those whom the local waste authority perceives to be the main causers of waste. I am at a loss to understand why anyone should object to such consultation. My amendment does not suggest that the waste authority must be bound by what the generators of the waste say, or that the legislation must be amended accordingly. It merely adds to the list of those consulted a requirement to consult those perceived to be the generators of the waste. I hope that the Minister will explain briefly why she could not accept that simple amendment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): I shall try to reassure the right hon. Gentleman. We expect local authorities to consult, but we do not want a strong statutory provision for particular people to be consulted, when the parent legislation that the Bill would amend contains no such consultation measures. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept my assurances that we envisage that there will be such consultation, but we do not want it included statutorily in the Bill. It would unbalance the legislation that the Bill would amend.

This enabling Bill is welcome and has support throughout the House. We fully expect local authorities that take it up to consult, but we want that to come about through guidelines rather than legislation.

Mr. Maclean: Although I am not reassured by the hon. Lady and I may wish to return to the matter on another occasion, I shall not pursue the issue today. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Angela Smith.]*

2.29 pm

Mr. Maclean: As I am not satisfied by the answer that I have received from the Minister, I wish to say a few words on Third Reading. While the Bill is reasonably innocuous, some of my concerns about it have not been addressed today. I shall not seek to talk about an amendment that, unfortunately, was not selected. It suggested that the word "anything" in line 11 of the Bill was rather wide and carte blanche.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 3 July.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (BEER AND CIDER) BILL

Order read for consideration (not amended in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Friday 3 July.

BREEDING AND SALE OF DOGS BILL

Order read for consideration (as amended in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Friday 3 July.

ENERGY CONSERVATION (HOUSING) BILL

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Third Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY BILL

Order read for consideration (as amended in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Colin Breed (South–East Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to object to the Bill and impose his will on the House, when the Bill has the support of those on his Front Bench and of the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): It is quite in order for the right hon. Gentleman to object in that way.

To be considered on Friday 3 July.

LOCAL AUTHORITY TENDERS BILL

Order read for consideration (as amended in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Further consideration what day? No day named.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (PROTECTION OF TITLE) BILL

Order read for consideration in Committee.

Hon. Members: Object.

Committee deferred till Friday 3 July.

PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (LONDON) BILL

Order read for consideration in Committee.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Committee what day?

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): On 3 July.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Lady have the authority of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill?

Dr. Tonge: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Committee deferred till Friday 3 July.

PREVENTION OF DELAY IN TRIALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

LEAD IN PAINT (HEALTH AND SAFETY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

WARM HOMES AND ENERGY CONSERVATION (FIFTEEN YEAR PROGRAMME) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS (WIND CHILL FACTOR) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 3 July.

RECYCLED CONTENT OF NEWSPRINT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

WATER INDUSTRY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

HOME ZONES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY (INFORMATION) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (EXPERIMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

GENEVA CONVENTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

ELECTRO-CONVULSIVE THERAPY (RESTRICTIONS ON USE) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

PUBLIC RECORDS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [30 January], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 3 July.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY CHANGES (REFERENDUM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

FARMING OF ANIMALS FOR FUR (PROHIBITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

COMPANIES (MILLENNIUM COMPUTER COMPLIANCE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

REFORM OF QUARANTINE REGULATIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

VOLUNTARY PERSONAL SECURITY CARDS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

MILLENNIUM CONFORMITY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

MENTAL HEALTH (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 July.

REGISTERED ESTABLISHMENTS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Mike Hall.*]

Question agreed to.

To be immediately considered in Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have a short statement to make. Occupants of the Chair have in the past deprecated proceeding at once from Second Reading to Committee if the Bill has only recently been printed. In this case, I should inform the House that the Bill was published only yesterday, on 23 April.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 7188/98 and 7161/98, relating to Economic and Monetary Union, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 30th April, Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Economic and Monetary Union, and the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings thereon not later than Seven o'clock.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic Adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 30th April, do adjourn till Tuesday 5th May.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

Question agreed to.

TAX CREDITS (INITIAL EXPENDITURE) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Tax Credits (Initial Expenditure) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

DATA PROTECTION

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That the following provision shall be made with respect to the salary of the Data Protection Registrar:

(1) In respect of salary for service in the period starting with 1st April 1996 and ending with 31st March 1997 the Data Protection Registrar shall be paid the additional sum of £483.

(2) In respect of salary for service in the period starting with 1st April 1997 and ending with 31st March 1998 the Data Protection Registrar shall be paid the sum of £62,001.

(3) In respect of service in the period starting with 1st April 1998 and ending with 30th November 1998 the salary of the Data Protection Registrar shall be £63,549 per annum.

(4) In respect of service in the period starting with 1st December 1998 and ending with 31st March 1999 the salary of the Data Protection Registrar shall be £64,484 per annum.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

Prime Minister's Press Office

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

2.39 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I am pleased to be able to raise this most important matter, which I know concerns many right hon. and hon. Members. I am sorry that the timing of the debate means that the Minister has not been able to return to his constituency to prepare for a good weekend. With no disrespect to him, however, it would have been more satisfactory to be able to hear from the Minister without Portfolio, who is mainly responsible for the presentation and co-ordination of Government policy. Perhaps the Government were keen to try to avoid a confrontation of that nature. I hope that that is not the case.

The issues that I shall raise may be batted away today, and the next time, and the time after that, but the Government are on a sticky wicket, and eventually they will find themselves out if they do not take action. I say that as someone who is broadly sympathetic to what the Government are trying to do; who believes that they have made great strides in some areas, notably constitutional reform; and who does not want to see the return of a Tory Government. I hope, therefore, that what I say will be taken in the constructive spirit in which it is intended.

My case is that, although the Government have done much to open the doors and let in fresh air, the method of operation of the press office runs counter to that. The very effectiveness of the Minister without Portfolio and of Mr. Alastair Campbell, the second Minister without Portfolio, and his colleagues is such that I believe that democratic accountability is being undermined. It is being undermined by the bypassing of Parliament by leaking stories to the media before Parliament is given the facts; by the use of the press office for party as opposed to Government purposes; by the incestuous relationship with Rupert Murdoch; and by the power apparently given by the Prime Minister to the unelected Mr. Campbell to order Cabinet Ministers about. I shall deal with each in turn.

Madam Speaker recently raised a most important and serious point, which deserves the serious attention of the House. Many Members, including me, feel strongly about the matter. I refer to the increasing tendency of the Government to leak news in advance to friendly media contacts, most notably in the Murdoch press. How many times have we woken up to a story in the newspapers heralding a Government announcement that trailed on behind in a statement at 3.30 pm? How many Budget leaks were there, playing up the good news and getting people accustomed to the bad, so that there would be a clearly positive reception for the event on the day? As Madam Speaker has said, all Governments have done it. She added that it had been "rather blatant" in the preceding six months.

In opposition, the Labour party was extremely good at news manipulation. I would take my hat off to it if I were wearing one—presumably it would be a top hat in this establishment. The Minister without Portfolio and Mr. Campbell are extremely effective. They played a major role in securing a Labour victory last year. To turn *The Sun* round from its Kinnock light bulb of 1992 to its support in 1997 was no mean feat.

The trouble now comes from that very effectiveness. What are the constraints upon the Minister without Portfolio and Mr. Campbell? Is it healthy that they should now continue to maximise their returns, when so many extra levers, and so many powerful ones, are now there to pull? A driver progressing from a Mini to a Jaguar—the Deputy Prime Minister, perhaps—does not put his or her foot flat on the floor. He or she will drive at well below maximum power. That is responsible and in the interests of others—and ultimately, also, in the interests of the driver.

In a recent television interview, Madam Speaker rightly said:

"There are far too many of what I would term apparatchiks who have been accustomed, when a party was in opposition, to want to get the maximum publicity. Now in government, they have to be harnessed a little more."

I entirely agree with Madam Speaker's sentiments.

Let me be clear. I am not criticising Mr. Campbell, who is only doing his job, and is doing it rather well. I am criticising the Prime Minister for allowing him too much leeway. I strongly suggest that he should now put a limit on the power afforded to his communications team. I shall be grateful if the Minister will give the House his personal opinion when he responds to the debate. I hope that such leeway is allowed on the Government Front Bench. I should be interested to know whether the Minister has drafted his speech or whether it has been provided for him to some degree from behind the scenes.

The Prime Minister recently made the revealing admission at Question Time that his chief press officer, a civil servant, did

"an effective job of attacking the Conservative party."—[*Official Report*, 1 April 1998; Vol. 309, c. 1252.]

That was an amazing flash of honesty; clearly the Prime Minister was not on message at the time. Will the Minister say under what circumstances Mr. Campbell or any special adviser is given the authority to act party politically?

I am grateful to the Minister for referring me this morning to a document from the Library, the "Model Contract for Special Advisers". Paragraph viii at page 12 states that special advisers must not take part in political controversy, must observe discretion, and must express comment with moderation. I humbly suggest that those descriptions do not fit Mr. Campbell and his press team. Will the Minister clarify whether the Prime Minister regrets making such an overt comment about Mr. Campbell's political activities, or does he stick by it?

Party and Government interests appear to have become clouded and dangerously entangled. The Government must realise that the interests of the Labour party are not the same as those of the Government, let alone the country. Will the Minister confirm that the Government accept that?

The attendance of the chief press officer at Cabinet meetings is also a cause for considerable concern. Is he now the unofficial 23rd Cabinet Minister—a surrogate who is a Minister in all but name? I cannot help wondering what purpose is being served. Does the Minister agree with the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, who said:

"Alastair Campbell's attendance at Cabinet meetings is perhaps another step down the path towards a presidential system."

Does he agree with the Cabinet Minister who on Sunday 5 April told *The Sunday Times*:

"It is all right if you are a fully paid-up Blairite. But if you are not, and you speak your mind in cabinet, there is a fear that No 10 will brief against you."?

That can only cause suspicion about the way in which the Government are dealing with Ministers, let alone Labour Back Benchers.

Hon. Members will recall that a stiff reprimand was recently delivered to the Secretary of State for Social Security in a letter from the press secretary which was published by the *Sunday Express*. According to the *Sunday Express*, Alastair Campbell wrote:

"I see from today's papers that no matter how much we urge silence, congenital briefing goes on about who was responsible for what . . . I do not want to see interpretation of either in tomorrow's press. It is time facts took over from personalities."

Did the Prime Minister authorise the letter? Does he endorse unelected officials treating Ministers like naughty children who need their pocket money withdrawn? Is it not humiliating for a Minister to be treated in such a way? Ministers may be reluctant to say anything publicly in case an unflattering article about them appears in the Murdoch press the next day.

Will the Minister clarify the chief press secretary's role in internal disputes between Ministers? The Prime Minister should publish as soon as possible a document about the press office that sets out the powers and responsibilities of those in it, how far they can go and the role of the strategic communications unit. There should be personalised job descriptions for such apparatchiks: we need to know their powers in relation to Cabinet Ministers, and what line management exists.

The Minister will say that things were the same when Bernard Ingham was the voice of Margaret Thatcher. Perhaps they were in some ways, but I thought that the Government wanted no truck with the sleazy behaviour that characterised the previous Government. I know that things are different, but they are not different in this area. The Government should be new Labour, not old Tory.

There is a deeper problem. The importance afforded to media image in recent years is at such a level that it distracts people from real issues. Instead of deciding what the Government want to do and marketing that accordingly, it seems that much time is taken up with how something will play in the media, with policy consequences following on behind. We must guard against that.

Recently there has been publicity over the relationship between the Prime Minister and those in his circle with Rupert Murdoch. It seems that no offence must be given to Mr. Murdoch. His media ownership in this country, which, at 40 per cent., is excessive, must not be touched. The Lords amendment that would have limited his power is to be overturned. Does the Minister understand how uncomfortable his Labour colleagues are with that line? Perhaps he, too, is uncomfortable with it.

Between 1985 and 1995, Mr. Murdoch's company, News International, paid only £11.74 million in tax on profits of almost £1 billion, at a rate of 1.2p in the pound. Such generosity to an American citizen who was born in Australia can hardly help the Treasury. The motivation is clear: it is to keep Mr. Murdoch on board and his newspapers on side.

[Mr. Norman Baker]

All Governments want maximum media support, but what if the price is to allow distortion of the media market and to play down, even tone down, the Government's European policy and credentials, so that he who is alleged to be virulently anti-European is not upset? Should a Government acting in the interests of the country pay that price?

If that motivation seems far-fetched, let us consider the article in *The Observer* of 19 April, in which the Minister without Portfolio, the spin doctor in the House, spoke about the extraordinary importance that Downing street attaches to maintaining the support of Mr. Murdoch's newspapers. He suggested that the Prime Minister feels that he has to "convert Murdoch" before a referendum can be called on the European single currency. Incidentally, the Foreign Secretary revealed that the Cabinet was never consulted on that.

Perhaps the Prime Minister's recent willingness to help Mr. Murdoch with his Italian business interests was an attempt to make him more sympathetic to Europe. Helping Mr. Murdoch by personally discussing his business on the telephone with the Italian Prime Minister was a generous gesture on his part. We are lucky to have such a considerate and caring Prime Minister. What a shame that the episode has been surrounded by what the Labour Chair of the Public Administration Committee described as

"the rather unedifying spectacle of half truths and non-denial denials".

At the beginning, the Prime Minister's official spokesman said that there was "no such phone call." The suggestion that our Prime Minister had helped Mr. Murdoch in that way was described as "a complete joke" by the Prime Minister's press secretary. The *Financial Times* revealed that an Italian official had confirmed the phone call and had told the paper that the impression that the Prime Minister was acting on behalf of Mr. Murdoch "would appear to make sense."

It was left to Mr. Murdoch's own paper, *The Times*, to confirm that the Prime Minister had indeed spoken to his Italian counterpart on Mr. Murdoch's behalf. No such phone call? A complete joke? If it was all so above board and proper, why was there a cover-up? We must conclude that senior Government figures have been somewhat economical with the truth from beginning to end. It seems that the Prime Minister is very much in bed with Mr. Murdoch, and I do not envy the Prime Minister in that respect.

This is all a pity, because the Government made such a good start with their freedom of information proposals. The episode is clearly at odds with the openness and progress elsewhere, although I note with interest a parliamentary answer that I received from the excellent and much leaked-against Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the effect that the No.10 press office and the strategic communications unit will be covered by that forthcoming legislation. Perhaps that sort of commitment explains why the Chancellor of the Duchy is so often leaked against. His assurance is in marked contrast to the Prime Minister's recent answers on the same subject.

Inquiries about how much the strategic communications unit will cost the taxpayer have been answered in non-committal terms—"The budget has not been finalised," or, "The budget will be set in the usual way". I keenly await freedom of information legislation.

There are other connections between the Prime Minister and Mr. Murdoch. We recently learned that another member of the Prime Minister's press office, deputy press secretary Tim Allen, had jumped camp to take up a senior job with BSkyB. It seems that News International has hired the lobbying firm Lawson, Lucas, Mendelsohn, which is well placed to whisper in Government ears. Neal Lawson once worked for the Chancellor of the Exchequer; Ben Lucas for the Home Secretary; and John Mendelsohn for the Prime Minister. It seems that among their roles is work on media ownership legislation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) recently joined in the widespread expressions of concern over the matter when he drew attention to it at Prime Minister's Question Time. He spoke about the "seemingly unstoppable growth" in the media power and political influence of Mr. Rupert Murdoch, saying that the Prime Minister must do something about media ownership, and that the only way of doing so was to amend the Competition Bill.

What is to be done to rectify these matters? The press function must be more accountable and less powerful, and that would be in the interests of democracy and of the Labour Government. As I said earlier, the Prime Minister should publish a paper setting out the exact remit of his press team. We need an annual report detailing the activities of the press office and an opportunity for Parliament to debate that. We need a commitment from the Prime Minister not to drive his press team with his foot to the floor, and a commitment that his press team will work in a Government rather than a party role. We need a commitment that important statements will be made first to the House and not leaked to the media in advance. Ministers must be allowed to do their jobs without being subjected to vilification by unelected officials and without having to worry about who is leaking against them.

I hope that the Government will take these issues seriously and will act accordingly. Will the Minister add his weight to such proposals? If he does, it will go some way towards addressing the many issues that I have raised.

I note that Mr. Campbell is due to appear before the Public Administration Committee in coming months to explain his actions in more detail because of the seriousness of the matter. I congratulate the Committee on its determination to hold the Government to account, and I look forward to reading its deliberations.

I hope that both the Minister and Government take on board the criticisms that I have raised—constructively, I hope—and continue down the road to fully accountable and transparent government. If the Government are brave, they will find many people to support them.

2.54 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I certainly put my weight behind all sorts of things. Whether I will put it behind the many contentions of the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) is a moot point. I came here to answer him on the subject of Prime Minister's press office, but, as usual in his scatter-gun approach, he seems to have ranged across a series of targets and, true to form, to have missed most of them.

The Government's overall political strategy, direction and style is set by the Prime Minister. As he has made clear, the Government intend to address serious problems with the consideration that they deserve. We shall co-ordinate the development of our policies within government, across departmental boundaries and in discussion with our private sector partners and the wider public and voluntary sectors. We shall communicate those policies clearly and coherently.

The Prime Minister has appointed his chief press secretary as a special adviser to advise him on the effective presentation of policy and to lead the No. 10 press office to ensure that the essential messages and key themes that underpin the Government's strategy are sustained. The strategic communications unit, which was established at the beginning of this year, adds a strategic dimension to the communication of Government policy. The unit reports to the Prime Minister's chief press secretary.

The No. 10 press office gives a clear sense of purpose and direction from the centre, liaising closely with departmental press offices, agreeing how departmental communications can best play into broader Government objectives, and ensuring that Government announcements are communicated in a structured and coherent manner—for example, through clearing major interview bids and the timing and form of announcements.

Authority for the co-ordinating and leadership role of the chief press secretary and the No. 10 press office flows from paragraph 88 of the ministerial code, which states:

"In order to ensure the effective presentation of Government policy, all major interviews and media appearances, both print and broadcast, should be agreed with the No. 10 Press Office before any commitments are entered into. The policy content of all major speeches, press releases and new policy initiatives should be cleared in good time with the No. 10 Private Office, the timing and form of announcements should be cleared with the No. 1o Press Office".

That is not a new requirement; it has been the practice—as the hon. Gentleman said I would remark—of successive Administrations. The only difference is that this Government are enforcing the rule.

On the specific issue of the memo that was issued by the chief press secretary to the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women and to the Minister for Welfare Reform, that was issued on the authority of the Prime Minister. The chief press secretary was acting entirely within the rules.

Incidentally, the No. 10 press office is staffed mainly by career civil servants, but this Government take the view that the post of chief press secretary—a post in the most politically exposed area of government—should be performed by someone who is not expected to have to perform a similar role for another Government.

There are many precedents for political appointments to the chief press secretary job at No. 10; we have to think only of people such as Joe Haines, who fulfilled a similar role. As a Government, we wanted to be above board and open about our intentions for that role, which is why, immediately on our election to government, we amended the Civil Service Order in Council to allow a maximum of three special adviser posts in No. 10 to have executive powers, allowing the people occupying those posts to have civil servants working directly for them.

We have heard from those on the Opposition Benches that those appointments are the first steps towards the politicisation of the civil service. That is most definitely not the case.

Mr. Baker: Just for the record, that comment was made by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Public Administration, who is a Labour Member, and not by me.

Mr. Kilfoyle: It may have been made by a variety of people, but, as I have said, it has been made from those on the Opposition Benches.

The terms of the special adviser contract, of which the hon. Member for Lewes said that he was aware as a result of a debate on the radio this morning, allows the chief press secretary and other special advisers to discharge their role with a degree of party political commitment that would not be permissible for a permanent, politically impartial civil servant.

Special advisers are free from the obligation placed on all other civil servants to be politically impartial. Unlike other civil servants, special advisers are not required to act in a way that would enable them to gain the confidence of future Ministers of another Administration. We believe that, by distinguishing clearly and openly the roles of special advisers, it avoids any creeping politicisation.

The hon. Gentleman made certain charges, including the one that uncontrolled power was wielded by the chief press secretary. He said that we should exercise some constraint over the operation of the press office and that we needed some clarification in writing of the powers and role of the press office. That is rubbish, even by the hon. Gentleman's standards.

The chief press secretary, like all other civil servants, is accountable to a Minister, who in turn is accountable to Parliament. The terms and conditions of employment are based on provisions set out in the model contract. What can and cannot be done by special advisers, including the chief press secretary, in such circumstances are circumscribed by the model contract for special advisers, which is published; by the ministerial code, which is published; by guidance on the work of the government information service, which is published; and by the Mountfield report, which sets out the relationship between special advisers and members of the government information and communications service, and which is also published.

The hon. Gentleman also made the charge of statements being leaked to the press in advance of being made in Parliament, and suggested that that was somehow attributable to the chief press secretary. The ministerial code clearly states:

"Ministers will want to bear in mind that the most important announcements should be made in the first instance to Parliament"—

and so they should. The hon. Gentleman referred to the letter from the chief press secretary to the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women and to the Minister for Welfare Reform. If he read the letter, he would recognise that the chief press secretary was exhorting people to stem the alleged leads from the Department.

The hon. Gentleman again spoke of an incestuous relationship with Mr. Rupert Murdoch, and linked it directly with the chief press secretary. Mr. Murdoch is

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

not treated any differently from anybody else. The hon. Gentleman referred to the telephone conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr. Prodi. Again, it has been made abundantly clear by the Prime Ministers and others that the reality is that the telephone call was initiated by Mr. Prodi, not the Prime Minister. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that he will go in to bat for any British company—indeed, he does so regularly. He did so for BSkyB.

The hon. Gentleman inferred that the chief press secretary speaks for the Labour party and so confuses his office. I want to make it clear here and now that the chief press secretary is not a spokesman for the Labour party; he is a spokesman for the Government and responsible for the presentation of Government policy. He also questioned whether the chief press secretary attends Cabinet meetings. There is nothing strange about civil servants attending Cabinet meetings as observers. If the hon. Gentleman wants to attribute some sinister motive to that, that is down to him. I assure him that he is far removed from the truth.

I wish that the hon. Gentleman would begin to understand the very different roles of the Minister without Portfolio and the chief press secretary. I do not know whether it is by design or through confusion, but he tends to mix up the two roles and the two personalities.

The hon. Gentleman referred to The *Observer* report of an anonymous member of the Cabinet who apparently made allegations about the way matters were conducted at No. 10. He should not expect anyone here to respond to anonymous allegations of any sort—whether they come from those on the Opposition Benches or those on the Government Benches, or are some fabrication by a third party.

The hon. Gentleman has also misunderstood line management in the context of the role of special advisers. It is abundantly clear exactly how the line management operates in terms of the chief press secretary's role in the press office at No. 10 and his relationship with the strategic communications unit. That unit was set up on the recommendation of the Mountfield report. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Robin Mountfield is a permanent secretary. The unit was set up with the full co-operation of the Government Information Service.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the civil service and, within that, the Government Information Service, would willingly lie down either before the politicisation of the civil service or before particular individuals or politicians trying to ride roughshod over its interests and professionalism, he not only misunderstands the civil service, and in particular the Government Information Service, but demeans its professionalism.

Civil servants are as interested as any politician in presenting for the Government of the day an effective case for Government policy. Clearly, politicians would be partial and political, but civil servants are not. They are professional people who accept that, with a change of Government, changing personalities and, indeed, changing times, the way in which the Government's message is communicated, across government, in the House and certainly to the wider public, is a matter to be reviewed. They have been extremely supportive.

Mr. Baker: For the record, I make it clear that I am in no way impugning the civil service; I was talking about the special advisers.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I accept that the hon. Gentleman made no direct imputation that the civil service was somehow weak or vacillating, but the thrust of his argument that there are certain special advisers and, indeed, elected politicians who ride roughshod over the service does not do sufficient credit to its professionalism and the fact that its members would respond dutifully according to their own code of conduct. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman seriously misunderstands that they appreciate that they have a very different role from that of the special advisers, which is especially so in the case of the job that the chief press secretary has.

I found some of the hon. Gentleman's charges a bit rich—he said that, somehow, the Government's message was being distorted and that we were not being wholly truthful about the way in which the press machines operates, whether in No. 10 or elsewhere—given that he represents a party renowned for the use of, for example, the *focus* leaflet. That leaflet is famous for its mixture of half-truths, innuendo and downright lies—it is a Heinz 57 variety of politics. A different version of that leaflet is appearing for different councils in different parts of the country, so we shall take no lectures from the hon. Gentleman or his party.

I submit that the No. 10 press office is performing a function that is key to success of the Government's communications strategy. It is working well—excellently, in fact. Nothing that we have heard today suggests otherwise. Indeed, the fact that some Opposition Members are reduced to attacking us on this matter rather than on any serious policy issue confirms just how well the No. 10 press office is performing that task.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 6 April 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Hospitality

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list planned expenditure on hospitality for April and May, indicating the date, location and purpose of each event. [35121]

Angela Eagle: Hospitality expenditure in April and May 1998 by this Department will be as follows:

Date	*Location*	*Purpose*	*Estimated cost (£)*
3–5 April	Leeds Castle	Informal meeting of G8 Environment Ministers	8,800
24–26 April	Chester	Informal meeting of the EU Transport and Environment Ministers	71,000

Bicycles (Transport on Trains)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the rail companies which ban the conveyance of bicycles at any time on their trains. [35968]

Dr. Strang: Anglia Railways, Gatwick Express, Great North Eastern Railways, Great Western Trains, Island Line, Midland Main Line and North Western Trains allow bicycles on all of their services. Passengers may need to book in advance. The other operators ban bicycles on some of their services, typically during peak hours. The Government are keen to promote the use of bicycles, and to ensure that as far as possible the railway provides suitable facilities for cyclists.

Headquarters Staff

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) of 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *608*, what percentage of staff in the headquarters element of his Department is based in *(a)* London, *(b)* the South East and *(c)* Scotland; and what percentage of salary and running costs relate to buildings in (i) London, (ii) the South East and (iii) Scotland. [37014]

Angela Eagle: At 1 January 1998, the percentage of staff in the headquarters element of my Department based in *(a)* London, *(b)* the South East and *(c)* Scotland was 80 per cent., 10 per cent. and 1 per cent. respectively. The percentage of salary and running costs for these locations could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Connex South Central

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations have been received by his Department in respect of the train services operated by Connex South Central between London and Brighton since that company was awarded its franchise; and if he will summarise their content. [36759]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Correspondence was not recorded by Train Operating Company until February 1997 (the Connex South Central franchise commenced in May 1996) and correspondence now identified by Train Operating Company is not recorded by route. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The number of letters about Connex South Central in general that have been received since February 1997 is 306.

Jubilee Line

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the cost to London Underground in each quarter of the last five years of compensation payments triggered by delays caused by defective trains on the Jubilee Line. [37200]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground do not have the information readily available in the exact form requested. The table shows the total value of all Customer Charter claims on the Jubilee Line in each four week period for each of the last four financial years. Information for the year 1993/94 is not readily available.

Period	*1994/95*	*1995/96*	*1996/97*	*1997/98*
1	106.8	52.8	999.2	375.2
2	280.1	493.9	110.6	44.4
3	74.7	196.5	124.0	253.0
4	146.9	185.9	138.1	355.0
5	5,874.1	152.6	18.8	398.0
6	1,299.8	257.3	50.4	63.0
7	579.9	[1]0	134.9	49.10
8	105.4	[1]0	388.5	146.8
9	834.1	[1]0	763.7	68.5
10	297.0	37.7	41.2	54
11	33.7	127.7	40.8	1,348.6
12	88.2	444.3	102.5	1,072.8
13	204.4	1,817.6	1,839.8	[2]—
Total	9,628.1	3,766.3	4,634.0	[2]4,228.7

[1] No claims were processed P7 to P9 in 1995/96 due to computer problems

[2] Figures for P13, 1997/98 are not yet available.

Note:

Figures are in pounds.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many delays of over two minutes there were to Jubilee Line underground trains in each month of the last five years caused by defective trains on the Jubilee Line. [37203]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground do not have the information readily available in the exact form requested. The table shows the number of delays of over

two minutes which have been caused by defective rolling stock in each four week period for the last five years.

Period	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
1	80	96	79	72	66
2	108	100	68	83	66
3	102	68	83	92	63
4	91	83	103	71	58
5	90	96	127	72	81
6	109	86	118	78	70
7	101	66	86	53	71
8	74	52	79	54	73
9	68	59	91	82	80
10	54	53	67	41	63
11	65	73	86	86	129
12	71	82	95	57	180
13	68	72	88	78	[1]143
Total	1,081	986	1,170	919	[1]1,143

[1] Period 13 ended on 31 March and the final figure was not available for this answer. This figure is therefore provisional.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many delays of over two minutes to Jubilee Line underground trains have been caused by defective new trains on the Jubilee Line in each week since their introduction. [37202]

Ms Glenda Jackson: New rolling stock has been phased into service since December 1997. This stock has suffered from a number of teething problems, but London Underground are working hard to overcome them. The need to maintain safety standards means that faults are rectified as they occur, which can result in delays.

London Underground do not have the information readily available in the exact form requested. The table sets out the number of delays of over two minutes which have been caused by defective rolling stock in each four week period since the start of the 1997–98 financial year.

Period	Number of delays
1	66
2	66
3	63
4	58
5	81
6	70
7	71
8	73
9	80
10	63
11	129
12	180
13	[1]143

[1] Period 13 ended on 31 March and the final figure was not available for this answer. This figure is therefore provisional.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many compensation payment claims have been triggered in the last five years because of delays to the Jubilee Line underground journeys caused by defective Jubilee Line trains. [37201]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground do not have the information readily available in the exact form requested. The table shows the total number of customer charter claims of all types on the Jubilee Line in each four week period for each of the last four financial years. Information for the year 1993–94 is not readily available.

Period	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
1	43	29	367	128
2	115	207	50	19
3	45	82	56	107
4	97	88	55	139
5	2,087	69	6	149
6	442	114	23	26
7	252	[1]0	52	20
8	52	[1]0	150	58
9	346	[1]0	243	32
10	115	20	17	22
11	22	56	15	481
12	38	151	43	420
13	180	457	614	[2]—
Total	3,719	1,273	1,541	[2]1,601

[1] No claims were processed P7 to P9 in 1995–96 due to computer problems.
[2] Figures for P13, 1997–98 are not yet available.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 222, to what depth *(a)* the area surrounding the site of the Millennium Dome and *(b)* the remainder of the Greenwich peninsula have been cleared of contaminants. [37079]

Angela Eagle: The whole of the Greenwich peninsula site has been remedied to render it safe for the known end uses. The remediation includes the removal or treatment on-site of contaminated soils, to depths of up to 14 metres in selected areas. Some of the treated material is re-used on the site and the remainder has been removed for disposal to suitable licensed landfill sites.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 222, what steps have been taken *(a)* to prevent contaminants from leaking to the surface and *(b)* to draw attention to the presence of contaminants below the surface on the Greenwich peninsula. [37076]

Angela Eagle: Contamination that remains in the soil and groundwater is prevented from rising to the surface by a layer of coarse crushed concrete, which has been recycled from old building foundations. Free from fine material, this prevents the natural capillary rise of the groundwater into the overlying clean clay capping. This clay capping, in turn, prevents contact between the site users and any residual contamination in the ground. Full records of all investigations undertaken, and site remediation works carried out, are kept by English Partnerships, the current site owners, as part of the Health and Safety file, as required under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994. In accordance with the regulations, this documentation will be made available to any future site owner, or occupant, including contractors and will inform them of any potential hazards on the site.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 222,

what certification has been provided by *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the Environment Agency concerning the removal of contaminants from the Greenwich peninsula. [37078]

Angela Eagle: No certification process is operated by the Health and Safety Executive with regard to contaminated land. They work with contractors to ensure that contractors' site activity is conducted in a safe manner and in accordance with the current regulations.

The Environment Agency have been consulted at all stages of the investigation, design and construction of the remediation works and have confirmed their satisfaction with the remediation strategy.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 222, if *(a)* cyanide and *(b)* arsenic were among the contaminants removed from the site of the Millennium Dome or any other area on the Greenwich peninsula. [37077]

Angela Eagle: The contaminated soils removed from the site have, on occasions, included arsenic and cyanide in various forms. All such soil has been disposed of, under strictly controlled procedures, to licensed landfill sites suitable to received it. These operations are part of the overall remediation strategy as agreed with the Environment Agency and London Borough of Greenwich.

Rented Housing

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 October 1997, *Official Report*, column 726, on rented housing, what would be the gross cost to the public sector if all local authority rents were to be cut by *(a)* 20 per cent., *(b)* 30 per cent., *(c)* 40 per cent., and *(d)* 50 per cent.; and in each case what would be the cost net of savings in housing benefits. [37197]

Mr. Raynsford: A reduction in Guideline Rent in 1998–99 for Housing Revenue Account local authorities in England would have the following estimated effects:

Present value (discounting to 1996–97) of effects from 1998–99 to 2027–28. 1996–97 prices discounting to 1996–97

£ million

Guideline Rent reduction in 1998–99	*Loss of gross rental income*	*Saving in rent rebates*	*Saving in public expenditure linked to the RPI*	*Net public expenditure cost*
20%	11,639	8,643	2,722	274
30%	17,459	12,785	4,083	590
40%	23,278	16,816	5,444	1,018
50%	29,098	20,726	6,805	1,567

Note:

Figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest £1 million. The calculations are derived from LAMOD, the Department's model for estimating the public expenditure effects of a change in Guideline Rent policy for local authorities. The results from LAMOD are sensitive to assumptions which are kept under continuous review. The housing stock is assumed to fall by about 114,000 dwellings each year, until 2007–08, as a result of Right to Buy sales, transfers, voluntary sales, new build completions and demolitions. This assumed annual decline in stock is in line with the present rate of change. The model assumes that the level of stock is constant after 2007–08 with no further decline.

London Underground

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what forecast his Department has made of how the number and extent of delays on London Underground will be reduced following the start of the new investment programme in 1998 and for each year over the next five years. [37269]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No such forecast has been made by my Department. We recently announced additional funding of £365 million for London Transport over the next two years. This will boost total investment in the existing network to £1 billion over two years. It is now for London Underground to assess how best to tailor its investment programme. The need to improve the service to passengers by reducing delays will be a key factor in this assessment. In the longer term, our plans for a public-private partnership will result in the elimination of the Underground's investment backlog, address the root cause of delays, and result in an improved service for all passengers.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many delays to London Underground services have been caused by *(a)* broken rails, *(b)* signal failures, *(c)* obstructions on the track and *(d)* all causes in total, for each of the last five years. [37271]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand from London Underground that the information requested is as shown in the table.

Cause of delay	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Broken/cracked rails	31	8	30	22	147
Signalling	1,783	1,718	1,862	1,891	9,435
Objects on track	217	208	248	327	314
All causes	35,952	34,150	34,463	34,767	38,840

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what initiatives he has taken to assist *(a)* women with young children and *(b)* pregnant women who must find alternative modes of transportation due to the travelling conditions on the London Underground. [37501]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is the Government's aim to make the Underground available to all, and our plans for a public-private partnership will help achieve that aim. But we do recognise that the Underground can currently be difficult for some groups of passengers to use. London Underground staff make every effort to assist passengers to use the system, but some still prefer to use other modes of transport. These passengers benefit from the substantial improvements to the capital's bus network which London Transport is making. Over 400 new single-deck, low-floor vehicles are already in service. These buses have no steps at the doorways and "kneeling" suspension which means that passengers can get on and off more easily. Low-floor double-deck buses are scheduled to enter service for the first time later this year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the conditions for *(a)* women with young children and *(b)* pregnant women travelling on the London Underground. [37502]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground is the oldest, and one of the deepest, underground systems in the world. Virtually the entire network was designed at a time when little or no thought was given to personal mobility. The Government recognise that, combined with the backlog of essential maintenance which has built up and the very crowded conditions on some parts of the network at peak times, this means some passengers find the Underground less easy to use than they would wish.

The Government wish to see a modern, high quality Underground which is available to everyone. That means tackling the investment backlog and improving accessibility. The Jubilee Line Extension will feature step-free access at all the new stations. London Underground also has plans for developing a network of 60 fully accessible stations and my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister has asked them to look at how these plans can be accelerated. But to achieve a radical improvement will require a massive long-term investment programme. This will be delivered by our plans for a public-private partnership, under which the private sector will raise the funds needed to modernise the network and provide improved conditions for all.

Roadworks

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what system of monitoring is in place to secure the most rapid possible completion of authorised roadworks in order to minimise disruption to traffic. [37276]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On trunk roads, major highway works are normally subject to the lane rental form of contract, which gives the contractor a direct financial incentive to complete the works as quickly as practicable, usually by combining a bonus for early completion with a daily charge for late completion. The equivalent works on local highway authority roads are the responsibility of the authority concerned and information about them is not held centrally.

Works by statutory undertakers and licensees are governed by the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. Street authorities are empowered by Section 66 of that Act to take action where the works are taking longer than reasonably necessary, but information about the use of the power is not held centrally.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what sanctions have been applied against those found in breach of the 12 month rule for the co-ordination of roadworks; [37275]

(2) how often over the last 12 months a breach of the 12 month rule for roadworks has been reported; and what follow-up action was then taken. [37277]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures apply in respect of the co-ordination of road work activity between repair, construction, cable and utility providers. [37278]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 the street authority (usually the local highway authority) is responsible for co-ordination of its own works and undertakers' street works in its area. The co-ordination machinery is set out in the Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of Street Works and Works for Road Purposes and Related Matters, published under the Act.

Charity Shops

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change the rate relief available to charity shops. [37500]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are currently reviewing all aspects of charity taxation including business rates. We will consider all representations that we have received on the subject before reaching any conclusions and will consult on any proposals before implementing them.

Rural Pubs

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government will extend to rural pubs the new village shop rate relief. [37344]

Mr. Raynsford: Under the village shop rate relief scheme, billing authorities already have the discretion to grant rate relief to public houses providing that certain conditions are met.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the members of the Countryside Commission, indicating the date and terms of their appointment. [37295]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* The information requested on current members of the Countryside Commission is provided. Further appointments will be made from time to time as vacancies arise.

Countryside Commission members

Name	*Date first appointed*	*Date current term of appointment expires*
Richard Simmonds CBE (Chairman)	[1]1.10.95	30.09.98
Rodney Swarbrick CBE	1.08.93	30.06.99
Lord Denham KBE	1.08.93	30.06.99
Rt. Rev Alan Chesters	1.10.95	30.09.98
David Barker MBE	1.10.95	30.09.98
Dr. Susan Owens	1.07.96	30.06.99
David Woodhall CBE	1.07.96	30.06.99
Wyndham Rogers-Coltman OBE	1.07.96	30.06.99
Dr. Victoria Edwards	1.04.98	31.03.01
Prof. Allan Patmore CBE	22.9.92	30.06.98

[1] As Chair

Railway Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to ensure that railway station platforms are made accessible to wheelchair bound passengers. [37786]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Access to railway stations and other transport infrastructure will be covered by the access to goods and services provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Government intend to implement the remaining provision of that Part of the Act and a further announcement will be made about implementation dates in due course.

John Pointon and Sons

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 12 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 727, when the Environment Agency expects to be able to determine whether to pursue the prosecution of Pointon and Sons over the spreading of waste from their abattoir in Cheddleton, Staffordshire. [37940]

Angela Eagle: I understand that the Environment Agency wrote to my hon. Friend on 25 March to explain where matters stand. I also understand that she has been invited to meet the Agency very shortly.

Landfill

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what incentives exist to encourage the location of new landfill sites for *(a)* inert waste and *(b)* other wastes on rural brownfield sites. [37521]

Angela Eagle: There are no specific incentives for this purpose. However, my Department encourages planning authorities to make appropriate use of previously developed land for all forms of development, including waste management.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the finances of local government of the increase in landfill tax; and if he will make a statement. [37523]

Angela Eagle: My Department will consider the implications of the increase in the rate of landfill tax from April 1999 as part of its discussions with the Local Government Association on the local government finance settlement.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the money raised as a result of the increase in landfill tax will be used to assist the work of environmental groups in the same way that funds currently raised from the tax are. [37552]

Angela Eagle: The same proportion—20%—of the increased revenue generated by the increase in the higher rate of tax as of April 1999 will be available for distribution to environmental bodies as is available under the current scheme. The Government will also be considering whether the environmental bodies scheme could be enhanced, and in particular examining how it could be used to encourage more recycling.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent landfill tax increase on the incidence of fly-tipping within the countryside; what steps he is taking to help councils minimise this; and if he will make a statement. [37522]

Angela Eagle: There is as yet little firm evidence either way of the impact of the landfill tax on fly-tipping. Responses to a recent survey of local government officials from the Tidy Britain Group seem to suggest that the incidence of fly-tipping has been lower than local authorities feared when the tax was introduced. We will continue to work with the Environment Agency, local authorities and the police, to monitor and tackle fly-tipping.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy to apply the precautionary principle to the release of GMO into the environment. [37518]

Mr. Meacher: Yes. A thorough assessment of the risks to human health and the environment must be carried out before a consent is granted to release a genetically modified organism into the environment. If the assessment reveals areas of uncertainty and if these are associated with significant potential damage, a precautionary approach would be adopted.

This policy is discussed in more detail in "A Guide to Risk Assessment and Risk Management for Environmental Protection" published by the Department in 1995. A copy is in the library.

Rail Freight

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that *(a)* the Rail Regulator and *(b)* Railtrack take into account the potential growth in rail freight traffic when considering the allocation of access paths. [37986]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Rail Regulator is under a statutory duty to promote both passenger and freight traffic. He must therefore take this into account when considering proposed access agreements. Railtrack have set out their latest plans for rail freight in the Network Management Statement, published on 25 March. Encouraging more freight by rail will be an important element of our integrated transport policy on which we will be publishing a White Paper shortly.

Aggregates

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the report of the work he has commissioned into the environmental costs of the quarrying of aggregates. [37553]

Mr. Raynsford: We expect to publish the report on the research into the environmental costs and benefits of aggregates supply later this month.

Local Government (Ethical Framework)

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish his proposals for a new ethical framework for local government. [38310]

Ms Armstrong: I intend to publish tomorrow the Government's proposals for a new ethical framework for local government in England. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

This paper is the last in the series inviting discussion on the Government's agenda for modernising local government in England. It sets out our proposals for a new framework of conduct for councillors and council staff. These proposals are built on the Third Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, presented to Parliament in July 1997 (Cm 3702).

Through our modernising agenda we are seeking to build and maintain a culture in which councils are open and readily accountable to their local communities. We believe our proposals for the new conduct regime will play a vital part in building up that culture, and restoring that essential bond of trust between local people and those who serve them in their local councils.

Canbury Gardens, Kingston

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if Kingston Borough Council was permitted to amend its UDP to enable the construction of flats in Canbury Gardens; and if he will make a statement. [38124]

Mr. Caborn: No. I understand that the flats are constructed on the site of the former Kingston Power Station.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the removal of tree preservation orders on poplar and chestnut trees in Canbury Gardens, Kingston; and if he will make a statement. [37852]

Mr. Caborn: None. I am not aware of the removal of any tree preservations orders on trees in Canbury Gardens, Kingston.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the cost of the planning inquiry, appeals and removal of trees in Canbury Gardens, Kingston. [37853]

Mr. Caborn: The planning application for the development of housing on the site of the former Kingston power station has not been subject to an appeal to the Secretary of State or to a public local inquiry. 14 representations have been received objecting to the removal of trees at Canbury Gardens.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the increase in the number of shadow road toll schemes to be made under the private finance initiative arrangements. [37862]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The only road scheme approved and being taken forward in England under private finance since May 1997 is the A13 Thames Gateway DBFO project. The payment mechanism for this project is being developed so that there will be no incentive to the operator to encourage commuting by car. The emphasis of the payment mechanism will be on efficient management of the road, to provide a good service for buses and Heavy Goods Vehicles, with scope for additional payments to reward a good safety record. We will consider whether it would be appropriate to take forward further DBFO projects in the context of the review of trunk roads in England which is currently underway.

Sites Of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to offer greater protection to sites of special scientific interest. [37860]

Angela Eagle: The Government are currently considering how best to improve the protection and management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Officials are preparing a consultation paper seeking views.

Housing (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps have been taken by his Department in respect of the initiative proposed by Coventry City Council for the development of a local housing company under the stock transfer programme. [37866]

Mr. Raynsford: Coventry City Council submitted an application for the 1998–99 housing stock disposals programme for the transfer of all 20,500 of their dwellings to a new local housing company. This scheme was not accepted because it presented us with a number of difficulties that could not be resolved in the short term—not least that the number of properties affected substantially exceeded the 12,000 threshold which the Government have set for transfers to a single new landlord. My officials do, however, intend to work closely with Coventry over the coming months to try and resolve these issues so as to make the scheme workable.

High Explosives

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *543*, what was the outcome of the discussions between the dangerous substances industry, environmental agencies and his Department on accidents involving storage facilities and dangerous substances to which the Seveso II Directive applies; and if he will make a statement. [36621]

Angela Eagle: My Department and the Health and Safety Executive, together with the Environment Agency and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, have undertaken wide informal consultation with industry associations, trades union representatives and local authorities likely to have duties under legislation implementing the Seveso II Directive. Their comments have been taken into account as proposals for legislation have been developed.

I will shortly consider publication of a public consultation document describing the proposed legislation and guidance. A period of four months will be allowed for comment before the legislation is finalised.

Acidifying Pollutants

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the damage caused by acidifying pollutants in the United Kingdom. [37868]

Angela Eagle: My Department has sponsored research into the effects of acidifying pollutants over the last ten years. Research expenditure, in this area, is currently about £2.7 million per year. This has contributed to reviews by two expert UK groups, the United Kingdom Review Group on Acid Rain (RGAR) and the Critical Loads Advisory Group (CLAG). Copies of the most recent produced by RGAR and CLAG, which include information on critical loads and critical levels, acid deposition and the acidification of lakes and rivers, have been placed in the Library of the House.

Drinking Water Quality

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to reduce levels of lead in drinking water. [37687]

Angela Eagle: The present national standard for lead in drinking water is 50 g/l; this is a more stringent standard than required by the 1980 EC Drinking Water Directive. New standards for lead will be introduced when the new EC Drinking Water Directive is adopted later this year. Member States will be required to achieve lead standards of 25 g/l within 5 years of adoption and 10 g/l within 15 years. The water in many properties already meets the new long term lead standard. At other properties, usually where there are lead pipes, lead concentrations in drinking water have been reduced significantly in recent years. Where appropriate, water companies are required to treat water to reduce its ability to dissolve lead and in many cases this will reduce lead concentrations to about 25g/l. A leaflet is available from the Drinking Water Inspectorate to help people determine if they have lead pipes and giving advice on measures that they can take to reduce their exposure to lead in drinking water.

Health And Safety

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to implement framework directive 89/391/EEC concerned with health and safety of the workforce. [37591]

Angela Eagle: The health and safety framework directive 89/391/EEC has been implemented in the UK primarily by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 and by existing health and safety law, including the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Discussions are continuing between my officials and the European Commission about our implementation of this directive, following which the Health and Safety Commission may consult later this year on some minor modifications to UK health and safety regulations.

Fly Posting

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what sanctions are available to local authorities to deal with organisations which fly post on *(a)* walls, *(b)* windows, *(c)* telephone equipment and *(d)* bus shelters, where the materials carry no imprint but identify the organisation and provide publicity for goods and services. [38074]

Mr. Raynsford: It is an offence, under section 224 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and Regulation 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992, to display an advertisement without the prior consent of the owner of the land, or premises, on which it is displayed. It is then immediately open to the planning authority to bring a prosecution in the Magistrates' Court. The present maximum fine on summary conviction of this offence is £1,000, with a daily penalty of £100 on conviction of a continuing offence. The level of fines is kept under review by the Home Office and updated periodically.

Section 224 also provides that people whose goods, trade, business or other concerns are given publicity by an unlawful advertisement may be prosecuted unless they can prove that it was displayed without their knowledge or consent.

District Councils and London Boroughs also have powers under Section 225, of the Act, to remove or obliterate any illegally displayed placard or poster after giving two days' notice of their intention to do so.

In addition, local highway authorities have powers, under section 132 of the Highways Act 1980, to remove unlawful advertisements attached to any trees, structures or works in the highway.

Highways Agency

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what targets he has set for the Highways Agency. [38205]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is currently conducting a number of major policy reviews. In the light of the conclusions, particularly of the Integrated Transport White Paper and the Roads Review we will be setting the Highways Agency new objectives. In the interim, the Secretary of State has set the Highways Agency the following key targets; they are to:

- Provide a service achieving five out of six (and missing the sixth by no more than 10 per cent.) of the targets set in accordance with the Whitehall Standards (as set out in Annexe E of the Plan);
- Submit to the Secretary of State a proposal for a revised Road User's Charter, in line with the Government's published Integrated Transport Policy by the end of the third quarter;
- In the interim, improve performance against the Road Users Charter Targets, set out in Annexe E of the Plan, where achievement levels were below target in 1997–98;
- Complete 2100 lane kilometres of surface renewal, including reconstruction, overlays, resurfacing, inlays and surface dressing;
- Comply with the EU directive which requires that the trunk road network is available for use by 40 tonne vehicles on 1 January 1999;
- Achieve 80 per cent. of National Scheme milestones set out in Annexe F of the Plan;
- Complete 20 projects, each costing less than £3 million, aimed at improving journey time reliability and/or reducing the impact of roads on the environment;

Complete 25 Network Control Projects;

Contribute to the Government's target of reducing road casualties by one third by the year 2000 (compared to the annual average for 1981–85) by ensuring that accident rates between 1996 and 1998 on the motorway and all-purpose trunk road network do not exceed 21 accidents involving personal injury for every 100 million vehicle kilometres of travel and by completing 200 projects, each costing less than £3 million, aimed at improving road safety;

Publish congestion monitoring information, including National Road Network Assessment system (NARNAS) maps and TrafficMaster data;

Review the Agency's environmental reporting requirements, to agree changes as necessary with DETR and submit the results to the Secretary of State by the end of the third Quarter;

Agree a revised Environmental Strategy for the Agency in line with the Government's published Integrated Transport Policy and in consultation with DETR, and submit the results to the Secretary of State by the end of the third Quarter;

Manage its Programme and Running Costs within the agreed financial allocation;

Deliver better efficiency and effectiveness throughout its business activities and achieve the two aggregate indicators and 80 per cent. of the Programme performance measure targets listed in Annexe C 4.2 of the Business Plan;

Apply Value Management and Value Engineering guidelines to all National Schemes at prescribed stages of preparation.

These targets are included in an interim Business Plan for 1998–99, which will be published shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Incompetent Builders

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he proposes to take to deal with incompetent builders. [38368]

Mr. Raynsford: I am today launching a consultation paper 'Combating Cowboy Builders', which sets out a range of measures aimed at protecting householders from incompetent or dishonest builders. I am placing copies in the Library.

The Government's aim is to protect consumers who want to find a competent builder but, through no fault of their own, suffer as a result of a "cowboy" builder. The first object is to help householders distinguish between the good and the bad builders. Then it is necessary to ensure that the householder, having selected a reputable builder, gets an assurance of good quality work underpinned by a means of redress if things still go wrong.

The Government have always made it clear that tackling the cowboys was one of their priorities for the construction industry. There is no simple, single solution to the problem. However, the Government believe that the package of measures proposed in this consultation paper will bring real benefit to householders and make life much harder for the cowboys.

The proposals contained in the document include:

encouraging local authorities or other local agencies to offer their residents lists of reputable builders who operate in their areas;

opening up Constructionline, the Government's own database of approved contractors, to the private sector and householders;

developing the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (which records craft skills on an ID card) and familiarising householders with it;

developing a construction industry kitemark to denote builders who will work to an agreed set of standards;

strengthening warranties for use in the event of inadequate work;

the possibility of broadening the Building Regulations regime so that it is better able to support quality across a wider range of repair and maintenance work;

finding ways in which lenders and insurers can play a greater role in helping householders to keep their homes in good repair using reputable tradesmen.

The paper invites comments and ideas from consumer groups, the construction industry and anyone with an interest.

Private Landlords (Accreditation)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce a national scheme to provide accreditation for private landlords. [37843]

Mr. Raynsford: We support the initiative taken by local authorities and others to develop voluntary accreditation schemes for landlords. We have no plans to establish a national scheme. Establishing, monitoring and enforcing such a scheme would be bureaucratic and costly. However, we are concerned about the problems of poor stock condition and management in the sector. Our Manifesto proposals for licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation will tackle those properties where the risks to health and safety tend to be the greatest.

Coastguard

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many rescue vehicles belonging to Her Majesty's Coastguard have had their bonnets overpainted yellow and had the words 'HM Coastguard' written on them in the last 12 months; and at what cost; [36886]

(2) when he expects to receive a report from the Coastguard Agency on the response to the consultation document regarding the future strategy of Her Majesty's Coastguard; and if he will make a statement. [36887]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In the last 12 months (1 April 1997—31 March 1998), 169 HM Coastguard vehicles had their livery changed at a total cost of £45,000; an average cost of some £266 each. The new livery includes a change to yellow bonnets with reverse lettered "HM COASTGUARD" and yellow/blue chequered stripes on either side of the vehicles more appropriate to their emergency service status. In addition to this, the new livery much improves the visibility of the vehicles to other road users and, therefore, improves the safety of drivers when proceeding to an emergency. The change promotes a more corporate image and a higher profile for HM Coastguard.

I have received a report on the 5 year Strategy consultation and am currently considering it. A decision on the strategy will be announced in due course.

Building Regulations (BAA)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding his future policy concerning

BAA plc's exemption as an entity under the Building Regulations under section 4 of the Building Act 1984. [37554]

Mr. Raynsford: Proposals for amendments to Section 4 of the Buildings Act 1984 in relation to the buildings of statutory undertakers were the subject of a public consultation document issued by the previous Government. I intend seeking the views of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee on how to take this matter forward. However, since primary legislation would be required to repeal or amend Section 4, it is unlikely that any change can be implemented quickly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries (Education)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what role her Department is undertaking in the promotion of education for children in developing countries. [38134]

Clare Short: As our White Paper makes clear, we are strongly committed to the key international targets of Universal Primary Education by 2015 and gender equity in primary and secondary education by 2005. We are currently spending over £100 million a year on education projects and expect this to rise as new programmes are agreed with our partner countries. For example we have begun implementation of major new basic education projects in India, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan and South Africa costing in excess of £100 million and new substantial projects are being developed in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda.

A new Department for International Development education policy paper will be issued later this year which will further elaborate our policies and endorse our commitment to the promotion of education for children in developing countries.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's budget was spent on youth training and education in developing countries in each of the five years up to 1997. [38135]

Clare Short: The percentage of identifiable expenditure under my Department's bilateral programme spent on training and education (including scholarships) for developing countries in each of the five years up to 1997 is 11 per cent. in each year. It is not possible to:

i. disaggregate figures between youth and adult training; and

ii. identify the percentage of expenditure spent on youth training and education under our contributions to multilateral programmes.

Tobacco

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her Department's policy on aid to the tobacco sector. [37977]

Clare Short: My Department does not use development assistance for any purpose which supports the tobacco sector. We support initiatives to help reduce tobacco consumption and to assist farmers who are dependent on tobacco production to diversify into alternative activities. We also seek to ensure that multilateral institutions pursue similar policies.

Bhutan

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has in respect of future levels of aid via the Bhutanese Refugee Assistance Programme. [37715]

Clare Short: My Department is a major contributor to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which is supporting 93,000 refugees from Bhutan in Nepal. We have also contributed over £250,000 to the work of Save the Children Fund (SCF) with Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Government of Bhutan, in relation to aid to Bhutan, concerning the human rights of Bhutanese citizens, with particular reference to those in refugee camps in Nepal. [37714]

Clare Short: My Department has had no recent discussion on development assistance with the Government of Bhutan. We shall continue to use every opportunity to encourage the government of Nepal and Bhutan in their dialogue to resolve the refugee issue.

Colombia

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what initiatives are being pursued to assist the street children of Colombia. [37456]

Clare Short: The Government recognise the severe problems faced by street children in Colombia who are often victims of sexual abuse or involved with drug problems. Over the last few years we have supported a number of Colombian NGOs working with street children and child prostitutes through our Department for International Development (DFID) Small Grants Scheme. In addition last year DFID voted in support of a 6.4 million ECU programme to help street children and young people in Colombia being financed under the European Commission's development programme.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the findings of the study he commissioned into section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 in respect of the payment of grants to support members of ethnic minorities. [37257]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The findings of this study will inform our further consideration of the matter. We expect to be in a position to make an announcement in the summer.

Motor Insurance

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted for driving a vehicle while uninsured for the last three years for which figures are available. [37283]

Mr. Michael: Information on the number of proceedings at magistrates' courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks, for the last three years for which figures are available, are given in the table.

Number of proceedings at magistrates' courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks—England and Wales

Year	*Number of offences*
1994	446,559
1995	441,241
1996 (provisional)	415,015

Firearms

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many previously licensed handguns have not yet been handed in following the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [37274]

Mr. Michael: Under the terms of the commencement of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, certificate holders were required to dispose of their handguns lawfully by 1 October 1997 unless they were covered by the specific exemptions set out in Part 1 of the Act. The majority of certificate holders chose to hand in their weapons to designated police stations, thereby becoming eligible to receive compensation from the Government. However, other certificate holders chose instead to export their weapons and store them abroad permanently, some to sell them and some to have them deactivated to the required national standard and so retain them at home. There is no central record of those weapons not surrendered to police forces.

From 1 October 1997, all chief officers were advised by the Association of Chief Police Officers to follow up their records of certificate holders and make checks on those certificate holders who had chosen not to surrender their weapons to the police. The subsequent prosecution of anyone found in possession of a prohibited weapon without lawful reason would be a matter for the police force and prosecution authorities concerned.

My officials have conducted a sample of a small number of forces and all have confirmed that they duly followed up their records of certificate holders and established that all guns recorded were accounted for.

In addition, we have asked all forces in England and Wales for a report on their success with the hand-in of 22 handguns which ended on 28 February. I will make the results available to the House once this information has been collated.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the timeframe for settlement of outstanding claims for compensation made under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997; [37289]

(2) if he will make a statement on the number of claims and payments relating to compensation paid to former owners of handguns obliged to hand in their weapons under the terms of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [37288]

Mr. Michael: Current estimates are that all remaining payments under Options A and B of the large-calibre handgun compensation scheme should be completed by about the end of May. The aim is to complete most, if not all, payments under Option C of the scheme by the end of the year. At 31 March, 38,592 claims under the large-calibre handgun scheme had been registered on the Firearms Compensation Section (FCS) computer system and 29,236 payments made. Around 2,000 claims are still to be registered, the majority of which will be under the large-calibre scheme.

The figures for claims and payments in this answer are lower than those normally quoted, as they exclude those made under the ex-gratia scheme for small-calibre pistols.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have been allocated to process claims in categories A and B under the Firearms Compensation Scheme. [37459]

Mr. Michael: The Firearms Compensation Section at present employs 62 staff, 53 of whom are working directly on the examination and authorisation of compensation claims. Currently the bulk of the effort is concentrated on processing claims under Options A and B of the compensation scheme, although a number of claims under Option C are being processed in parallel.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time currently taken to process claims under categories A and B of the Firearms Compensation Scheme. [37458]

Mr. Michael: The Firearms Compensation Section is currently dealing with claims received from the police on 25 September 1997, giving a current turn-round time of 27 weeks. The average processing time for claims dealt with since the start of the compensation scheme in July 1997 is just over 15 weeks.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people under categories A, B and C of the Firearms Compensation Scheme have received full compensation for their claims. [37460]

Mr. Michael: The information at 2 April 1998 is as follows:

Claimants under Option A paid in full: 28,085

Claimants under Option B paid in full: 27,168

Claimants under Option C paid in full: 261.

Since an individual may claim under more than one option, the total number of payments under all the options is greater than the total number of claimants participating in the scheme. The figures include applications under the ex gratia surrender scheme for small-calibre pistols.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken in respect of procedures relating to the revocation of gun licences following the Dunblane tragedy. [37463]

Mr. Michael: Under section 30 of the Firearms Act 1968, the chief officer of police may revoke a firearm certificate at any time if he is satisfied that the holder is prohibited by law from possessing firearms, or is of intemperate habits or unsound mind, or is otherwise unfitted to be entrusted with a firearm. Following the

Dunblane tragedy, the Government considered Lord Cullen's report carefully, to see how any weaknesses in the firearms licensing system might be remedied.

Lord Cullen's Report suggested that the power to revoke a certificate should be extended to allow the police to revoke partially a certificate in relation to any firearms which the owner no longer has a good reason for possessing. This recommendation was carried forward through the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 and was brought into force on 1 July 1997.

The Government have also taken steps to ensure that the police receive a proper flow of information on which to base their decisions. Under the 1997 Act, those who hold firearms principally for target shooting must be a member of a shooting club approved by the Home Departments. Each club must appoint a liaison officer to keep the police informed of members' activities, and the club is obliged to inform the police if any member has not shot with the club for over a year.

Lord Cullen also recommended that the arrangements under which an individual could appeal to the courts against the revocation of his certificate should be revised and clarified. The 1997 Act now makes it clear that an appeal is to be determined on its merits (that is, as a full re-hearing rather than as a review).

Domestic Violence (West Midlands)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of domestic violence were reported to the police in the West Midlands Region in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [37245]

Mr. Michael: The latest available information on domestic violence incidents recorded by the police, obtained from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 1996–1997 Annual Statistics Return, is shown in the following table.

Domestic violence incidents

Police force	*1996–1997*
Staffordshire	1,744
Warwickshire	493
West Mercia	1,867
West Midlands	14,011

Anthrax

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he was first notified of the Iraqi threat to infiltrate British ports with the anthrax virus. [37255]

Mr. Straw: As I indicated in my reply to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 24 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 180, initial information about possible anthrax smuggling was received in the Home Office on 5 March. That information was assessed thoroughly alongside all other relevant information and an assessment of Iraqi intentions. I was notified on 21 March.

Young Offenders

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls aged (1) less than 15, (2) 15 to 16, (3) 17 to 18 and (4) 18 to 21 years were held as convicted prisoners in (i) local authority secure accommodation, (ii) young offenders' institutions and (iii) adult prisons at the latest date for which figures are available and at the same date in each of the previous four years; [37539]

(2) how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls aged (1) less than 15, (2) 15 to 16, (3) 17 to 18 and (4) 18 to 21 years were held on remand in (i) local authority secure accommodation, (ii) young offenders' institutions and (iii) adult prisons at the latest date for which figures are available and at the same date in each of the previous four years. [37536]

Ms Quin: The available information on the number of young persons remanded to local authority accommodation in England is published in a Department of Health publication entitled "Children accommodated in secure units" (reference A/F 97/21). This information is presented on a financial year basis with the last report covering the year ending 31 March 1997.

Information on the number of young persons held in Young Offender Institutions and adult prisons is given in the table. Many "adult" establishments contain separate units or designated accommodation of young offenders and such persons are normally accommodated separately from adult prisoners. In the tables such establishments have been classed as "adult" establishments.

Information on the population of young offenders by age and type of custody is also published in successive volumes of "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (Table 3.2 of 1996 edition, Cm 3732), copies of which are in the Library.

Population of young offenders in Prison Service establishments by age, type of custody, type of establishment and sex, 1994–1998

	Age			
Establishment type	*Under 15*	*15–16*	*17–18*	*19–21*
Males				
28 February 1998				
Remand:				
YOI	—	233	1,242	1,216
Adult prison	—	3	54	67
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	709	2,570	4,721
Adult prison	—	2	22	75
28 February 1997				
Remand:				
YOI	—	262	1,169	1,303
Adult prison	—	12	100	134
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	649	2,260	4,216
Adult prison	—	3	42	93
29 February 1996				
Remand:				
YOI	—	185	955	1,110
Adult prison	—	38	248	280
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	531	1,678	3,622
Adult prison	—	4	55	176
28 February 1995				
Remand:				
YOI	—	134	949	1,165
Adult prison	—	49	247	280
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	441	1,401	3,380
Adult prison	—	3	60	119

Population of young offenders in Prison Service establishments by age, type of custody, type of establishment and sex, 1994–1998

Establishment type	Age Under 15	15–16	17–18	19–21
28 February 1994				
Remand:				
YOI	—	158	1,136	1,453
Adult prison	—	1	46	100
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	375	1,502	3,197
Adult prison	—	—	4	43
Females				
28 February 1998				
Remand:				
YOI	—	—	7	4
Adult prison	—	—	46	64
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	28	73	130
Adult prison	—	8	46	62
28 February 1997				
Remand:				
YOI	—	—	1	3
Adult prison	—	—	37	43
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	22	54	89
Adult prison	—	10	20	61
29 February 1996				
Remand:				
YOI	—	—	5	2
Adult prison	—	—	30	42
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	11	41	77
Adult prison	—	3	10	49
28 February 1995				
Remand:				
YOI	—	—	5	7
Adult prison	—	—	17	45
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	15	31	90
Adult prison	—	4	18	32
28 February 1994				
Remand:				
YOI	—	—	—	—
Adult prison	—	—	28	37
Sentenced:				
YOI	—	7	22	59
Adult prison	—	6	8	35

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what obligations are placed on the Government in relation to the use of adult prisons for young offenders by *(a)* the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and *(b)* the Children Acts; and if he will make a statement. [37538]

Ms Quin: Article 37(c) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that every child deprived of his or her liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interests not to do so. The United Kingdom has entered a reservation to the Convention to the effect that the mixing of children and adults is permitted where there is at any time a lack of suitable accommodation or adequate facilities for a particular individual in any institution, or where the mixing of adults and children is deemed to be mutually beneficial.

The Children Act 1989 does not apply to those in prison custody but the Prison Service is planning to reflect the principles and guidance of that Act in the new regime standards it is drawing up for juveniles.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the circumstances under which a young person under the age of 18 years should be held in an adult prison rather than in a young offenders' institution or local authority secure accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [37540]

Ms Quin: All young offenders sentenced to detention in a young offender institution (YOI) must be and are held in accommodation designated as a YOI. An unsentenced young person aged under 18 cannot be held in a YOI but must be held in a prison under Prison Rules although almost all unsentenced young people are held in accommodation with other young people. The Government's policy is to move towards a situation where it is no longer necessary to hold juveniles on remand in adult prisons. The Crime and Disorder Bill will enable the courts to remand vulnerable juveniles to local authority secure accommodation. The Prison Service is drawing up plans to hold all juveniles separately and to establish new regime standards for juveniles. We believe these measures will help protect the public and the welfare of these young people.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government are taking to encourage courts to make greater use of alternatives to custody when sentencing young offenders. [37537]

Mr. Michael: In reforming the Youth Justice System, the Government's key focus, and the statutory aim it will impose on youth justice agencies, is to prevent offending. By acting to intervene with young offenders earlier and more effectively we will stop them offending before they get to the stage where the courts have to consider custody. We are strengthening the range of community penalties available to the courts when sentencing. By putting in place local Youth Offending Teams to supervise offenders serving these sentences and the Youth Justice Board to set standards for supervision and inspect performance, we are acting to improve the quality of community sentences. All this will give sentencers more options in imposing community sentences and greater confidence to use them as alternatives to custody.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish continuity in the proposed youth offending teams. [37364]

Mr. Michael: Youth offending teams will build on existing good practice in the work of youth justice teams and will ensure that work with young offenders is undertaken effectively and consistently across England and Wales.

The Government will publish guidance on the establishment and operation of youth offending teams. The guidance will address the staffing and functions of the teams. The Youth Justice Board, which is to be established under clause 35 of the Crime and Disorder Bill, will monitor the operation of the youth justice system and the provision of youth justice services which will be co-ordinated locally by youth offending teams.

Drug Dealers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the establishment of *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum sentences for repeat convicted drug dealers. [37256]

Mr. George Howarth: We believe that severe punishment is appropriate for drug dealers. The maximum penalty for trafficking in Class A drugs is life imprisonment, and for Class B drugs 14 years' imprisonment. The Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 provides for a minimum sentence of 7 years' imprisonment for third and subsequent convictions for trafficking in Class A drugs. This provision was implemented on 1 October 1997.

Security Service

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy towards the publication in the press of disclosures by former MI5 officers. [37669]

Mr. Straw: I deplore any publication of unauthorised disclosures of information on security or intelligence matters.

Former Security Service officers are bound by a duty of lifelong confidentiality arising out of their employment by the Security Service. They are also liable to prosecution under section 1 (1)*(a)* of the Official Secrets Act 1989 if, without lawful authority, they disclose information relating to security and intelligence obtained by virtue of their membership of the Service.

Where the Government become aware of any plans by a former member of the Security Service to disclose such security or intelligence information without authority, we shall take such steps as are open to us, including seeking restraining injunctions against the individual in question and the relevant publisher, to prevent such disclosures. Investigation of possible offences under the Official Secrets Act arising from unauthorised disclosure is a matter for the police.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards the funding of MI5. [37670]

Mr. Straw: The budget of the Security Service is carried on the Single Intelligence Vote (Class XVIII Vote 2).

Provision for the security and intelligence agencies is agreed collectively by Ministers when setting public expenditure plans.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to allow individuals on whom files are held by MI5 to see those files in cases where it is intended that such files be destroyed. [37874]

Mr. Straw: No. In order to safeguard the operational effectiveness of the Security Service, it has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information about the operations of the Security Service, including whether the Service holds or has held files on any individual.

Drug-related Crime (Gwynedd)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made of the levels of drug-related crime in Gwynedd in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1997. [37599]

Mr. George Howarth: No estimates of the total amount of drug-related crime in particular counties have been made, although statistics on offences against the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 in each police area are published annually by the Home Office.

Animal Research

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many wild-caught primates, broken down by species, are currently held in the United Kingdom for the purpose of animal research; and if he will indicate in each case the purpose of the procedures for which they are being used. [37879]

Mr. George Howarth: Rules banning the use of wild-caught primates (unless exceptional and specific justification can be established) were introduced in 1996. Before then, records relating to the acquisition of wild-caught primates for use under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 were not kept centrally.

We do know, however, that three wild-caught Rhesus macaques, imported before 1996, are still undergoing regulated procedures in neuroscience studies.

The only wild-caught primates imported since 1996 and currently held in the United Kingdom for use under the terms of the 1986 Act are two baboons. These are for use in heart xenotransplantation research. One of these two baboons has already been used in a regulated procedure. The other has not yet been used.

Lewes Prison

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to replace the health care centre at HM Prison Lewes. [37873]

Ms Quin: The Governor of Lewes prison and senior representatives from the Prison Service will be meeting in May to discuss how to improve the facilities in the health care centre and the provision of health care services.

Canbury Gardens, Kingston

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the expenditure by the Metropolitan Police in the operation to remove protesters from Canbury Gardens, Kingston, to enable the local authority to cut down trees; and of this, how much was borne by *(a)* the Metropolitan Police, *(b)* the Sheriff and *(c)* the local authority. [37854]

Mr. Michael: The Metropolitan Police Commissioner tells me that it is not possible in the time available to make a full and accurate calculation of the costs.

The cost of the police operation was wholly borne by the Metropolitan Police. The four day operation required 855 officer days, at a cost of £168,073. In addition, £51,058 was incurred in overtime. No account has been taken of additional support services costs involved.

Mark Darren Day

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Cases

Review Commission will conclude its consideration of the case of Mark Darren Day, convicted of murder on 26 March 1993 at the Central Criminal Court. [37508]

Mr. Michael: I understand that the Criminal Cases Review Commission has completed its initial assessment of Mr. Day's application, which is now awaiting the availability of staff time for a detailed review. Applications at this stage are regularly reviewed for the priority that can be given within available resources and Mr. Day was last informed of the position on 23 March. The Commission cannot say when it will conclude its consideration of his case; this will depend on the issues raised in the case and the work identified to be done, both initially and as the case progresses.

Runaway Children

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of children aged under 16 years who have run away from home. [37686]

Mr. Michael: The available information is from the National Missing Persons Bureau, which was set up by the Home Office in 1994 as a national resource for information on vulnerable people who go missing. The Bureau maintains information on people who have been missing for over 28 days. Cases of persons missing for shorter periods may also be referred to the Bureau if the referring police force has particular cause for concern. At present, the National Missing Persons Bureau has records of 125 children under 16 who have been missing for more than 28 days and 36 children who have been missing for shorter periods. It is not known whether they are runaways or if there are other causes for their disappearance.

Slot Machines

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if slot machines in pubs fall under his Department's definition of hard gambling; what recent research on this subject his Department has evaluated; and if he will make a statement. [38063]

Mr. George Howarth: How hard or soft a particular form of gambling is depends on its intrinsic features and the statutory controls which are applied.

Gaming machines in pubs allow rapid re-staking, but to control the risks that poses they have relatively low maximum stake and prize levels (30 pence and £10 respectively). Also, in pubs £10 machines are allowed only as an ancillary facility and only in the bar area; and they require specific authorisation by the licensing justices, who normally allow only two or three per establishment.

With these restrictions, such machines have hitherto been considered as relatively soft gambling, but the Government keep the risks under review. We are carefully considering a February 1998 study by Dr. Sue Fisher, published by OFLOT, which identified as problem machine gamblers some 4 per cent. of a sample of nearly 10,000 schoolchildren aged 12–15 in England and Wales. More of those problem gamblers had played machines in pubs than in any other venue.

We have also expressed support for a proposal by GAMCARE—the national problem gambling charity—to commission a large-scale independent study of gambling of all kinds among people aged 16 and over.

UN Committee Against Torture

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the UK Periodic report to the UN Committee Against Torture to be completed; and if he will place the report in the Library. [37222]

Mr. Straw: The United Kingdom's Third Periodic Report under Article 19 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture has been submitted to the United Nations by the United Kingdom Mission in Geneva. Copies have been placed in the Library and have been sent to organisations with a known interest in the subject area. The report is also available on the Internet.

Home Affairs Research and Statistics Directorate

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the titles of projects *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* completed by the Home Affairs Research and Statistics Directorate in the past six months, indicating which of these have been published and how their findings have been made available. [37221]

Mr. Straw: The following projects were either ongoing or completed during the period October 1997 to March 1998. Where a project has been completed, the publication reference is given:

Project Title	*Status*	*Publication*
Age limits for Mother and Baby Units	completed	Not yet published. Research findings planned
Assessment and management of work related stress among Prison Service staff	completed	Not yet published—article to go in prison service journal
Attitudes of ethnic minorities to crime and criminal justice	ongoing	Findings to be incorporated in study on "Young People in multi-ethnic Britain"
Attrition of racial incidents cases	deferred because of the introduction of new legislation	—
Classification systems for sex offenders (Part I)	ongoing	Final report received—Home Office will publish a research findings shortly
Community Sentence Demonstration Projects	ongoing	
Comparative costs and performance of private and public prisons	completed	Review of Comparative Costs and Performance of Privately and Publicly Operated Prisons 1996–97, Prison Service Research Report December 1997
Conceptual Framework for Crime prevention	ongoing	—

Project Title	*Status*	*Publication*
Coroners	completed	HORS to be published on 20 April
Council of Europe Sourcebook	ongoing	—
Crack cocaine and criminal lifestyles	ongoing	—
Crime and opiate misuse	ongoing	—
Crime recording practices (HMIC review)	completed	Instruction books issued to police forces on 20 March 1998
Demanding Physical Programmes for Young Offenders	ongoing	—
Developing a Risk/Needs Assessment Scale for the Probation Service	completed	Published in Home Office guidance "Management and Assessment of Risk in the Probation Service, June 1997
Domestic violence	ongoing	—
Drugs Throughcare	ongoing	—
Electronic Monitoring of Curfew Orders: year two	completed	HORS 177 and Research Findings 66
Entry into the CJS	ongoing	—
Ethnic monitoring by police forces	ongoing	Information for 1996–97 published for the police in Home Office publication "Race and the Criminal Justice System" (December 1997)
Ethnic Monitoring by police forces	completed	HORS 173, December 1997
Ethnicity and victimisation	completed	HOSB 6/98—3 April 1998
Evaluating the effects of the bail process projects	completed	HORS 184 to be published in April 1998
Evaluation of a link worker scheme to help deal with the mentally disordered at the police station	ongoing	—
Evaluation of court psychiatric assessment schemes for mentally disordered offenders	ongoing	—
Evaluation of Home Office cautioning circular 18/1994	completed	Research Findings 53
Evaluation of Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) Scheme	completed	Not yet published. Research findings planned
Evaluation of pilot projects for new community measures	ongoing	—
Evaluation of Pilot Regimes for Young Offenders: Colchester YOI and Thorn Cross HITP	ongoing	—
Evaluation of Sex Offender Treatment Programme (Part I)	completed	Research findings in preparation for June 1998
Evaluation of the new PACE codes of practice	completed	HORS 174 and Research Findings 62
Evaluation of the public order provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994	ongoing	—
Evaluations of projects funded under European Year against Racism	ongoing	—
Exclusion from School, Criminal Careers and Effective Interventions	ongoing	—
Fast Tracking for Juveniles in the courts	completed	Research Findings due in April 1998
Firearm offences	ongoing	—
Imposition and discharge of restriction orders	ongoing	Report prepared for publication—May 1998
Knowledge of sentencing. Mike Hough & Julian Roberts	completed	HORS 179 and Research Findings 64—5 January 1998
Lay Visitor Schemes	ongoing	—
LIPS/Surrey Probation Employment Initiatives	ongoing	—
Local Voluntary Activity Surveys	ongoing	3 LOVAS papers and 4 LOVAS Area Reports 1997. Other reports due soon
Maintenance and Operation of Police Funding Formula	ongoing	Police Grant Report (England and Wales) published 2 February 1998
Mandatory Drug Testing evaluation	ongoing	—
Misuse of Drugs	completed	HORS 172, September 1997
Monitoring of Charities' incomes before and after the National Lottery	ongoing	Due May-June and October-November 1998
Monitoring the right of silence provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994	ongoing	—
Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators	completed	Research Findings 64 [full report available on request]
New Methodology for Prison Population Projections	ongoing	Paper at Or39 Conference of Operational Research Society—published in Operational Research Insight—January-March 1998
Notified addicts	ongoing	—
Offending on bail	ongoing	Publication of Research Findings 72 expected April 1998
Offensive weapons	ongoing	Statistical Findings in preparation
Operation of s.48 of the Mental Health Act 1983	ongoing	Publication of Research Findings expected in May-June 1998
Perpetrators of racial harassment	completed	HORS 176, November 1997
Police and ethnic minorities	completed	Research Findings 59
Police recording practices	ongoing	—
Prison Service staff stress audit	ongoing	—
Prisoner activity expansion	not yet started	—
Probation Motor Projects: a reconviction study	ongoing	—

Project Title	*Status*	*Publication*
Public attitudes to drug-related crime	completed	Research Findings 67, January 1998
Reconviction rates after sentence at the Crown Court	completed	Report made available in January 1998
Reconviction studies	ongoing	—
Reconviction study of those given community penalties: the effect of social variables	ongoing	—
Recording of racial incidents	ongoing	—
Relations between police and minority communities	ongoing	—
Review of Deterrence	ongoing	—
Sentencing practice in the courts following the CJAs 1991 and 1993	ongoing	To be published as a HORS, May 1998
Serious Offences	ongoing	—
Sex Offenders Treatment Programme for Rapists (Part II)	ongoing	—
Sexual victimisation	completed	Academic Journal, Autumn 1997
Study of attrition process in rape cases	ongoing	—
Survey of absconding from hospital by restricted patients	ongoing	—
The admissibility and sufficiency of evidence in child abuse prosecutions	ongoing	—
The police and victims	completed	Research Findings 60, December 1997
The Use of Pre-Sentence Information (school reports) in the Youth Court	completed	Journal article in preparation; publication date not yet confirmed
Third party disclosure	ongoing	—
Treatment of drug misusers in the community	ongoing	—
Urine testing of arrestees	completed	Scheduled for publication April 1998
Victim statements and 'one stop shop' pilot projects	ongoing	—
Victims and witnesses in magistrates Courts	completed	Research Findings 68, January 1998
Video violence and young offenders	completed	Research Findings 65
Voluntary supervision of released prisoner	completed	Publication due in next two months
Vulnerable or Intimidated witnesses	ongoing	Publication planned in May as annex to Review group's report
Work aimed at improving the quality of police incident data	ongoing	HMIC letter to Chief Constables issued 12 March 1998
Young offenders from different ethnic groups	ongoing	—
Young people in multi-ethnic Britain	ongoing	—

Note:
HORS = Home Office Research Study
HOSB = Home Office Statistical Bulletin

The research programme for 1998–99 will shortly be made available on the Home Office web site [http://www.open.gov.uk/home—off/rsd/rsdhome.htm] and a copy will be sent to the House of Commons Library. The list of current publications from the Research and Statistics Directorate is also available on the Home Office web site or from my department on request. All Research and Statistical publications are sent to the House of Commons Library as a matter of course.

Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *559*, what plans he has to publish the instructions to Immigration Service and Home Office staff on dealing with immigration cases. [37964]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am pleased to announce that a copy of the disclosable version of four of the six volumes of the Immigration Directorates' Instructions (IDIs) is being placed in the Library. The material is subject to periodic review and revision. We shall arrange to provide the Library with any necessary amendments or new instructions.

The IDIs consist of internal guidance to staff about the handling of on-entry and after-entry immigration casework. They are being made available in accordance with the principles of openness in the White Paper on Freedom of Information and in the existing Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. A small amount of material cannot be disclosed, either on the grounds of national security or because disclosure would prejudice the effective operation of immigration controls.

Arrangements are now in hand to make this information available on the Internet. Because of the volume of material and the technical arrangements involved, it is likely to take approximately six weeks before this process is complete. I shall make a further statement in due course. In the meantime, members of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's After-Entry User Panel are being consulted about other suitable ways of facilitating access to this information.

Separate sets of internal instructions on asylum, enforcement, European Economic Area and nationality casework will be made available in due course. We are also examining disclosure of the remaining two volumes of the IDIs insofar as they relate to immigration casework. Much of the material in those volumes relates to internal administrative matters, such as general guidance on the drafting of letters, which would not normally be relevant to those outside the Home Office.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Leisure Centres

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of local authority leisure centres; and what recent reports he has evaluated on this subject. [36850]

Mr. Banks: The English Sports Council (ESC) has collected extensive facilities data and is creating a Facilities Planning Model (FPM) which will enable it to undertake assessments of community sports facilities across England. Reports on a total of ten regional assessments, based upon the FPM and individual National Governing Body Strategies, should be available in the autumn. My Department will also be producing guidance to all local authorities on developing and publishing leisure strategies to improve planning and policy making, following examples of the best.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the forecast level of central and local government financial support for the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002. [37366]

Mr. Banks: Manchester City Council's bid document to host the Commonwealth Games in 2002 outlined the fact that the public funding requirement was estimated at £114 million. My Department, along with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, are currently reviewing the level of funding required to stage a highly successful Games, in conjunction with Manchester City Council and the English Sports Council.

Sportsmark Scheme

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the progress of the second round of applications for the sportsmark scheme. [36618]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* The English Sports Council has received a total of 413 applications for this round of the Sportsmark scheme, 363 for Sportsmark award and 50 for Sportsmark Gold. This includes applications from special schools. The applications are currently being considered and we hope to announce in June those schools which have been successful.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which piers he has visited in the North West of England since May 1997. [37280]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not yet visited a pier in the North West.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which theatres he has visited in the North West of England since May 1997. [37281]

Mr. Fisher: As Minister for the Arts, I have made several visits to the region—most recently meeting the Artistic and Administrative Directors of the Octagon Theatre in Bolton on 18 March. In February I was a guest of Braham Murray at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, and I had the pleasure of speaking at the Manchester Evening News Theatre Awards in December 1997.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on earnings generated from tourism from overseas visitors in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [37247]

Mr. Tom Clarke: Spending by overseas visitors in the United Kingdom in the last three years is estimated to be (a) £11.8 billion in 1995, (b) £12.4 billion in 1996 and (c) £12.7 billion in 1997. Overseas visitors' spending in 1997 was some 15 per cent. higher in real terms (taking account of inflation) than in 1994.

Millennium Commission (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the projects in Staffordshire which have been allocated funding by the Millennium Commission. [37585]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Library.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Solvent Abuse

39. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Council if the United Kingdom anti-drugs co-ordinator will meet individuals or organisations to discuss the prevention of solvent abuse. [36295]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Keith Hellawell, the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator, met Warren Hawksley, the Director of Re-Solv—a national charity concerned with Volatile Substance Abuse—on 2 April as part of his ongoing extensive consultation process.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill

40. **Mr. Russell:** To ask the President of the Council what representations she has received on the allocation of additional time for the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill. [36296]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I have received a number of letters, as well as oral questions on the subject. The procedures and time available for all private Members' bills are well established. Whether a bill passes during the time available is a matter for its supporters and opponents.

Statements

41. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement on the procedures relating to arrangements for oral statements. [36297]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Modernisation Committee, in its recent report on Conduct of Debate, recommended no change in procedure but said statements should normally last no more than ten minutes and that the questioning following them should be brisk.

Private Members' Legislation

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Council if she will make more time available for private Members' legislation. [36298]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The amount of time for private Members' legislation is set out in the standing orders and the days for its consideration are agreed by the House at the start of each session. It would be wrong to change these arrangements at a time when bills are already going through the procedure. The amount of time allocated overall in future sessions is something which could be looked at by the Modernisation Committee.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Council if she will increase the opportunities available for debating Select Committee reports. [36299]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I am prepared to consider increasing the number of opportunities for such debates it if is clear that the demand for them really does exceed the current supply. Any increase under current arrangements would have to come on Wednesday mornings and would therefore be at the expense of other adjournment debates.

Allowances (Chamber Attendance)

Mrs. Bottomley: To ask the President of the Council if she will take steps to link the payment of hon. Members' allowances to hon. Members' attendance in the Chamber. [36300]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: No. The House has no system for recording attendance in the Chamber. It is up to individual Members to decide how best to carry out their parliamentary and constituency duties.

TREASURY

Tax Credits

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total number of families who are eligible for the maximum childcare credit for *(a)* one child and *(b)* two or more children; and what proportion of these he estimates will take up the childcare credit for each of the first five years of its operation. [36360]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 26 March 1998]:* I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 1 April 1998, *Official Report,* columns *533–54.* Families are eligible for the childcare tax credit only if they have eligible childcare costs. Those with eligible childcare costs below £100 a week (for one child families) and £150 for two or more children will not be entitled to the maximum childcare help.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his estimates of the additional employment which will result from *(a)* the working families tax credit and *(b)* the childcare tax credit in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [36396]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The Government expect that their programme of tax and benefit reform to make work pay will, like their New Deals, help people move off welfare and into work.

Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update Table 3.3 on page 48 of the Red Book to include the numbers of people affected by high marginal deduction rates of 50 per cent. or more. [36444]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Members for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 31 March 1998, *Official Report,* columns *447–48.*

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to 1.2.1 on page 10 of the Red Book, for what reasons higher tax revenues in 1997–98 are not assumed to carry forward fully into future years. [36450]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* Table B10 of the March 1998 FSBR shows changes in the forecasts of tax receipts between the July 1997 and March 1998 Budgets. Receipts from income tax, corporation tax, VAT and social security contributions are all likely to be higher in 1997–98 than forecast last July. In the case of income tax, VAT and social security contributions, these higher receipts do carry through to higher forecasts of receipts for 1998–99. However, the forecast for non-oil corporation tax receipts has been revised down by £2.2 billion in 1998–99, mainly because of a much lower than expected outturn for company profits in 1997, and the forecast of North Sea revenues has been revised down by £0.8 billion in 1998–99, because of lower oil prices.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a revised version of the information in Table 3.3 of the Red Book separately identifying the marginal rates of each individual in a two-earner couple. [35864]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 23 March 1998]:* The information requested is contained in the table. It shows that the number of people facing very high marginal tax rates has been significantly reduced. The number facing marginal rates above 70% has been reduced by about two thirds, including the effect on both partners within a couple.

000s

	Before		*After*	
	Heads	*Spouse*	*Heads*	*Spouse*
100 per cent. or more	5	5	0	0
90 per cent. or more	130	60	20	10
80 per cent. or more	300	150	200	100
70 per cent. or more	740	400	260	110
60 per cent. or more	760	420	1,010	240

Figures are for families where at least one partner works 16 hours or more, and are based on 1997–98 caseload and take-up rates. Figures are based on Family Expenditure Survey data.

Figures in the table do not reflect the NICs reforms which reduce the high marginal rates for those just below the Lower Earnings Limit.

Pensioners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out which measures relating to pensions in the Budget will *(a)* increase and *(b)* decrease the incomes of pensioners. [35882]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 23 March 1998]:* The Government's commitment to today's and tomorrow's pensioners should be in no doubt. Ensuring an adequate income in retirement is key to the Government's Strategy. We have already taken action to help all pensioners—especially the poorest.

One of the Chancellor's first actions was to reduce VAT on domestic fuel. In the Pre-Budget report the Chancellor announced help for winter fuel bills for pensioners for this winter and next. A payment of £50 is being made to pensioner households receiving income support and £20 to other pensioners, in addition to any Cold Weather payments they may receive. And we are spending £15 million looking at ways of encouraging the poorest pensioners to take up their entitlement to income support.

The Chancellor also ensured, in his recent Budget, that pensioners on modest incomes would be protected as the forthcoming changes to the Married Couple's Allowance take effect.

Finally the Social Security Green Paper reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the Basic State Retirement pension as the foundation of pension provision, and to increase it at least in line with inflation. A green paper on pensions later this year will set out how we intend to encourage increased saving for retirement.

Environmental Sustainability

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a green book on environmental sustainability to accompany the Financial Statement and Budget Report in future budgets; and if he will make a statement. [36372]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* It is intended that future Financial Statement and Budget Reports will incorporate assessments of the environmental impact of the Budget.

"Financial Statement and Budget Report"

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update Table B18, page 128, of the Financial Statement and Budget report, to give the figures in real terms, using 1996–97 prices. [36373]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The table shows the Control Total by department in real terms in 1996–97 prices and comparisons with previous plans, consistent with the cash figures published in table B18 and the GDP deflators in table B1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, March 1998.

Control total by department in real terms (1996–97 prices)

£ million

	Outturn	*Previous plans*[1]		*Estimate*	*Plans*	*Changes from previous plans*	
	1996–97	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[2]	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[2]	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[2]
Defence	22,345	21,250	21,040	21,260	21,040	10	0
—sale of married quarters	−962	−680	0	−680	0	0	0
Foreign Office	1,053	1,040	1,000	1,060	980	20	−20
International Development	2,344	2,130	2,200	2,200	2,190	70	−10
Agriculture, Fishers and Food	4,229	3,660	3,230	3,520	3,180	−140	−40
Trade and Industry progs	3,064	2,970	2,860	3,060	2,800	90	−60
Trade and Industry—Nat Inds	−394	−20	−170	−140	−130	−120	40
ECGD	15	10	0	40	50	30	50
DETR	12,975	12,380	11,480	12,270	11,500	−110	20
DETR—Local government[3]	31,321	30,550	30,190	30,550	31,000	0	820
of which education SSA[4]	17,764	17,880	17,550	17,880	18,340	0	790
Home Office	6,486	6,700	6,460	6,700	6,520	0	60
Legal Departments	2,674	2,650	2,550	2,660	2,540	20	−10
Education and Employment[5]	14,495	13,530	12,690	14,240	12,370	710	−320
Culture, Media and Sport	959	860	870	890	860	20	−10
Health	33,816	34,000	33,750	34,410	35,170	410	1,420
of which NHS	33,043	33,450	33,210	33,780	34,550	330	1,340
Social Security[6]	76,905	77,690	78,580	77,530	79,130	−170	540
Scotland	14,421	13,960	13,630	14,130	13,800	170	170
Wales	6,817	6,720	6,500	6,770	6,590	60	90
Northern Ireland	8,026	8,010	7,810	8,070	7,950	60	140
Chancellor's Departments	3,190	3,080	2,970	3,170	2,930	80	−30
Cabinet Office	1,157	1,010	1,280	950	1,240	−70	−40
European Communities	1,717	2,190	2,260	1,740	2,310	−450	50

Control total by department in real terms (1996–97 prices)

£ million

	Outturn 1996–97	Previous plans[1] 1997–98[2]	Previous plans[1] 1998–99[2]	Estimate 1997–98[2]	Plans 1998–99[2]	Changes from previous plans 1997–98[2]	Changes from previous plans 1998–99[2]
LASFE	13,182	12,700	12,800	13,200	13,200	500	400
Allowance for shortfall	—	—	—	–400	—	–400	—
Reserve	—	2,200	4,700	—	2,900	–2,200	–1,800
Control total	259,834	258,700	258,700	257,200	260,200	–1,500	1,400

[1] Previous plans have been adjusted for transfer and classification changes and deflated to 1996–97 prices using GDP deflator forecasts from March 1998 FSBR.
[2] All figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million except for the Reserve, Control Total and local Authority self-financed expenditure (LASFE) which are rounded to the nearest £100 million.
[3] Includes payments of Revenue Support Grant and National Non-Domestic rates to English local authorities. These finance, at local authorities discretion, a range of local services, including education, social services and other environmental services.
[4] Previous plans for education SSA in 1998–99 estimated as a proportion of total SSA.
[5] Does not include local authority Total Standard Spending on education, shown under DETR-Local Government. Figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are distorted by the effect of sales of student loans and abolition of nursery vouchers.
[6] Excluding cyclical social security.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will redraft Table B18, page 128, FSBR, March 1998, to show expenditure in each year as a percentage of forecast GDP; and if he will add to Table B18 a line to cover total estimated expenditure of United Kingdom education, expressed as a percentage of GDP. [36374]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The table shows the Control Total by department as a percentage of GDP for current and previous plans, consistent with the cash figures published in table B18 and the GDP figures in Table B1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, March 1998. It also shows a memo item for total UK education expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

Control total by department as a percentage of GDP

	Outturn 1996–97	Previous plans[1] 1997–98	Previous plans[1] 1998–99	Estimate 1997–98	Plans 1998–99
Defence	3.0	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7
—sale of married quarters	–0.1	–0.1	0.1	–0.1	0.0
Foreign Office	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
International Development	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Trade and Industry progs	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Trade and Industry—Nat Inds	–0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
ECGD	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
DETR	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5
DETR—Local Government[3]	4.2	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.9
of which education SSA[4]	*2.4*	*2.3*	*2.2*	*2.3*	*2.3*
Home Office	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8
Legal Departments	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Education and Employment[3]	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.6
Culture, Media and Sport	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Health	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.5
of which NHS	*4.4*	4.3	4.2	*4.4*	*4.4*
Social Security[4]	10.2	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Scotland	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.7
Wales	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8
Northern Ireland	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Chancellor's Departments	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Cabinet Office	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
European Communities	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3
LASFE	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7
Allowance for shortfall	—	—	—	–0.1	—
Reserve	—	0.3	0.6	—	0.4
Control Total	34.5	33.3	32.8	33.2	33.0
Memo:					
Total UK education spending[5]	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.7

[1] Previous plans have been adjusted for transfer and classification changes and ratios calculated using GDP forecasts in FSBR March 1998.
[2] Includes payments of Revenue Support Grant and National Non-Domestic rates to English local authorities. These finance, at local authorities discretion, a range of local services, including education, social services and other environmental services.
[3] Previous plans for education SSA in 1998–99 estimated as a proportion of total SSA.
[4] Does not include local authority Total Standard Spending on education, shown under DETR-Local Government. Figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are distorted by the effect of sales of student loans and abolition of nursery vouchers.
[5] Excluding cyclical social security
[6] The 1997–98 and 1998–99 figures for total UK education expenditure exclude the proceeds from the sale of the student loanbook portfolio, and are based on estimates of Local Authority education spending.

Family Credit (Owner-occupiers)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the current number of claimants of family credit in each region and nation; what proportion of this number are owner occupiers; and if he will estimate the number of beneficiaries of the working families tax credit in each region and nation on the basis of present proposals and incomes, separately identifying the proportion who would be owner occupiers. [36393]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* Estimates of the number of claimants of Family Credit by region appear in the Family Credit Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (Table 9.1). The Government have made no regional estimates of the number of beneficiaries of the Working Families Tax Credit.

The Government estimate that about half of those entitled to the Working Families Tax Credit will be owner-occupiers.

Museums (Free Admission)

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many national museums he expects to retain free admission as a result of Budget proposals; and for how long. [36778]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* Five national museums and galleries will retain free admission for the financial year 1998–99 following the creation of a Challenge Fund to promote access and education initiatives in museums. Extra money has also been made available for museums in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Future levels of funding will be announced as part of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Resuscitation Dummies

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make resuscitation dummies eligible for exclusion from VAT; if he will provide incentives to charities to purchase resuscitation dummies; and if he will make a statement. [37267]

Dawn Primarolo: The supply of resuscitation dummies has always been subject to VAT. This position is the subject of a challenge to the VAT and Duties Tribunal, which is the proper forum for resolving questions of liability.

Casinos

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much was contributed to the Treasury by the casino industry through overseas earnings in the last year for which figures are available. [36824]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 31 March 1998]:* There are no official data on which to base such an estimate.

EU Contributions

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* net and *(b)* gross British contribution to the EU on a per capita basis for each of the last four years, indicating the savings resulting in *(a)* and *(b)* from the British rebate. [36344]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is set out in the table.

United Kingdom gross and net contributions, per capita, 1993 to 1996

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Gross contribution[1] (£ million)	7,985	7,189	8,889	9,133
Abatement[2,1] (£ million)	2,539	1,726	1,207	2,412
Gross contribution after abatement (£ million)	5,446	5,463	7,682	6,721
Receipts[1] (£ million)	3,291	3,253	3,665	4,369
Net contribution (£ million)	2,155	2,211	4,017	2,352
Population (millions)	58,191	58,366	58,480	58,680
Gross contribution per head (£)	137	123	152	156
Gross contribution after abatement per head (£)	94	94	131	115
Net contribution per head (£)	37	38	69	40
Value of abatement per head[1] (£)	44	30	21	41

[1] Annual contributions include corrections and adjustments in respect of amounts paid in earlier years.

[2] The UK's abatement is paid a year in arrears, so that it reflects the UK's excessive net contribution in the previous year. The abatement made available to the UK during the year also takes account of corrections and adjustments made in respect of earlier years.

[1] Indicates negative amount.

Sources:

Gross contribution, abatement, receipts and net contribution taken from the Government's annual White Paper, Statement on the EC Budget.

Population figures taken from European Economy (1996 Broad Economic Policy Guidelines) published by the European Commission.

Air Quality (Budget Measures)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total annual reduction of *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* other greenhouse gases, *(c)* nitrogen oxide and *(d)* carcinogenic particulates which will arise from measures contained in the Budget. [36941]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *436*.

Population Statistics

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the past 20 years, the number of *(a)* males and *(b)* females in each of the

age groups (i) 0 to 18, (ii) 19 to 60, (iii) 60 to 65 and (iv) over 65-year-olds; and what are his projections of their numbers for each of the next 20 years. [37524]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 6 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for the number of (a) males and (b) females for the past 20 years and projections for the next 20 years.

The attached two tables provide the information by the ages and gender requested for the United Kingdom.

Population estimate figures for the United Kingdom for the last 20 years

Figures in 000s

Year	Total persons	Total males	0–18	19–59	60–65	Over 65	Total females	0–18	19–59	60–65	Over 65
1977	56,190	27,345	8,276	14,488	1,695	2,887	28,845	7,860	14,425	1,939	4,621
1978	56,178	27,330	8,177	14,601	1,619	2,932	28,848	7,768	14,542	1,861	4,678
1979	56,240	27,373	8,101	14,740	1,553	2,980	28,867	7,689	14,661	1,785	4,732
1980	56,330	27,411	8,013	14,768	1,599	3,031	28,919	7,605	14,688	1,829	4,797
1981	56,352	27,409	7,909	14,798	1,630	3,072	28,943	7,501	14,737	1,856	4,849
1982	56,318	27,391	7,797	14,837	1,666	3,090	28,927	7,381	14,782	1,889	4,875
1983	56,377	27,429	7,672	14,963	1,703	3,091	28,948	7,260	14,882	1,924	4,882
1984	56,506	27,511	7,537	15,140	1,764	3,070	28,995	7,139	15,009	1,982	4,865
1985	56,685	27,611	7,449	15,296	1,810	3,057	29,074	7,053	15,146	2,024	4,851
1986	56,852	27,698	7,373	15,430	1,761	3,134	29,153	6,981	15,278	1,954	4,940
1987	57,009	27,789	7,307	15,560	1,718	3,203	29,220	6,917	15,393	1,895	5,015
1988	57,158	27,876	7,252	15,680	1,686	3,258	29,282	6,863	15,498	1,850	5,071
1989	57,358	27,989	7,214	15,803	1,673	3,300	29,368	6,828	15,600	1,825	5,115
1990	57,561	28,118	7,182	15,943	1,664	3,329	29,443	6,792	15,707	1,808	5,136
1991	57,808	28,246	7,179	16,040	1,661	3,366	29,562	6,788	15,814	1,797	5,163
1992	58,006	28,362	7,175	16,137	1,648	3,402	29,645	6,795	15,892	1,776	5,181
1993	58,191	28,474	7,188	16,220	1,632	3,433	29,718	6,813	15,959	1,752	5,193
1994	58,395	28,592	7,220	16,298	1,622	3,451	29,803	6,848	16,035	1,732	5,188
1995	58,606	28,727	7,254	16,375	1,620	3,478	29,878	6,884	16,083	1,718	5,193
1996	58,801	28,856	7,298	16,435	1,620	3,503	29,946	6,926	16,120	1,707	5,193

Note:
Figures may not add exactly because of rounding.
Source:
ONS, Annual Mid-Year Population Estimates for England and Wales.
GRO(s) for Scotland, NISRA for Northern Ireland.

Population projection figures for the United Kingdom for the next 20 years

Figures in 000s

Year	Total persons	Total males	0–18	19–59	60–65	Over 65	Total females	0–18	19–59	60–65	Over 65
1997	59,002	28,983	7,344	16,482	1,622	3,536	30,019	6,971	16,155	1,700	5,193
1998	59,170	29,089	7,349	16,546	1,634	3,560	30,081	6,979	16,209	1,708	5,184
1999	59,323	29,187	7,339	16,617	1,654	3,576	30,136	6,970	16,272	1,727	5,168
2000	59,473	29,283	7,329	16,690	1,671	3,593	30,190	6,959	16,338	1,744	5,149
2001	59,618	29,377	7,322	16,773	1,665	3,617	30,241	6,953	16,413	1,739	5,137
2002	59,759	29,468	7,311	16,835	1,677	3,646	30,291	6,943	16,467	1,750	5,131
2003	59,896	29,557	7,299	16,868	1,711	3,678	30,339	6,932	16,492	1,786	5,130
2004	60,029	29,643	7,270	16,900	1,757	3,715	30,386	6,904	16,515	1,832	5,135
2005	60,159	29,727	7,236	16,939	1,799	3,754	30,432	6,872	16,542	1,873	5,145
2006	60,286	29,809	7,196	16,976	1,847	3,789	30,477	6,834	16,569	1,923	5,152
2007	60,414	29,890	7,144	16,928	2,008	3,810	30,524	6,784	16,511	2,084	5,145
2008	60,541	29,970	7,097	16,913	2,108	3,851	30,571	6,738	16,484	2,187	5,162
2009	60,669	30,049	7,048	16,925	2,159	3,917	30,620	6,690	16,486	2,238	5,206
2010	60,799	30,128	6,991	16,958	2,182	3,997	30,671	6,633	16,510	2,261	5,267
2011	60,929	30,206	6,937	16,996	2,200	4,073	30,723	6,581	16,541	2,275	5,327
2012	61,062	30,284	6,900	17,027	2,205	4,152	30,778	6,543	16,564	2,279	5,392
2013	61,197	30,361	6,863	17,051	2,128	4,320	30,836	6,508	16,580	2,198	5,550
2014	61,333	30,438	6,840	17,059	2,089	4,450	30,895	6,486	16,580	2,153	5,675
2015	61,469	30,513	6,825	17,065	2,069	4,555	30,956	6,474	16,578	2,129	5,775
2016	61,605	30,587	6,803	17,066	2,072	4,645	31,018	6,453	16,573	2,128	5,863

Note:
Figures may not add exactly because of rounding.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which age group the highest number of new cases of breast cancer as a proportion of the total number of women in that age group was diagnosed in the last year for which figures are available. [37731]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Stinchcombe, dated 6 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on new cases of breast cancer.

The information requested is given in ONS Monitor 'Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer, England and Wales, 1992', MB1 97/1. A copy of this publication is held in the House of Commons library.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which illness caused the highest number of deaths of women in the 35 to 54 years age group in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [37721]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Stinchcombe, dated 6 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on which illness caused the highest number of deaths of women in the 35 to 54 years age group in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available.

In 1996, the illness which caused the highest number of deaths to women in the United Kingdom aged 35 to 54 was breast cancer with 2,593 deaths.

DEFENCE

RAF Stations

12. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the Strategic Defence Review in respect of RAF stations. [36268]

Dr. Reid: Since the launch of the Strategic Defence Review we have received a number of representations on a wide range of matters concerning the Royal Air Force.

Ethnic Recruitment Initiatives

15. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress made on the ethnic recruitment initiatives in Newham and Sandwell. [36271]

Dr. Reid: It is our aim that the Armed Forces should better reflect the society they seek to defend. To this end, contact with the local communities, including the police, further education colleges, religious and community leaders in both Newham and Sandwell is continuing. We very much hope that through these initiatives recruits will be attracted from all sectors of the local communities.

Training Areas

17. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the availability of training areas. [36273]

Dr. Reid: The majority of training land held by my Department is used by the Army. An estimate of the availability of Army training land was made in a study, the results of which were reported to the House in March 1997. The study concluded that there was a shortage of land for training in the United Kingdom in comparison with the requirement.

Gulf Presence

18. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the deployment of British troops to the Persian Gulf. [36274]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones).

Territorial Army

19. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Territorial Army. [36275]

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Territorial Army. [36269]

Dr. Reid: I refer the hon. Members to the oral answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) earlier today.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* peacetime, *(b)* wartime and *(c)* estimated actual strength of the TA as a total and by individual corps, together with actual strengths for the infantry and yeomanry or such of this information as is readily available. [38136]

Dr. Reid: The volunteer strength of the TA as at 1 February 1998 is 55,786 against an establishment of 59,000.

The detailed information requested is presented below. Figures detailing Arm/Service strength are available only for non-Regular personnel and it has therefore been possible only to present strengths excluding Regulars.

Peacetime establishment is composed of Regular personnel, Non-Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS) and TA personnel. The wartime establishment is achieved by augmenting units with individual reservists, namely ex-Regulars.

Arm/Service	TA	Reg	NRPS	Establishment		Strength[1]
				Peacetime	Wartime	
Household Cav and RAC[2]	2,568	112	101	2,781	3,219	2,171
RA	4,025	136	118	4,279	4,756	3,130
RE	6,251	248	134	6,633	9,204	5,456
R Signals	5,362	382	153	5,897	7,277	4,447
Infantry	16,602	411	546	17,559	22,710	15,890
AAC	157	25	14	196	306	155
AMS	4,786	159	67	5,012	7,237	4,423
RLC	9,968	293	130	10,391	14,111	9,315
REME	2,190	89	27	2,306	5,168	3,542
AGC	1,170	22	15	1,207	1,571	2,477
Int Corps	729	12	27	768	772	642
OTC	3,500	103	58	3,661	3,661	4,953
RAChD	117	0	0	117	117	103
RAVC	14	0	0	14	14	12
TA Bands[3]	840	0	24	864	864	—
Others[4]	721	0	112	833	833	472
Total	59,000	1,992	1,526	62,518	81,820	57,188

[1] Figures by Arm/Service are only available for non-regular Personnel. The total of 57,188 comprises 1,402 NRPS and 55,786 volunteers. It excludes all regular personnel.
[2] These units relate to the Yeomanry.
[3] The TA Band establishment is shown separately, but actual strength of Band Personnel is included within Arm/Service.
[4] Includes TA Public Information Officers, Staff, Northern Ireland NRPS Guards.

The future size and shape of the Territorial Army is being considered in the Strategic Defence Review. Prior to this, volunteer strengths had been planned to fall to 54,000 in 1998.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned and actual strength of all arms of the Territorial Army in 1998. [37742]

Dr. Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

Royal Air Force (Germany)

20. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review he has conducted of the proposed date for the withdrawal of the RAF from Germany. [36276]

Dr. Reid: It remains our intention that the RAF withdraw from RAF Laarbruch in 1999 and from RAF Bruggen in 2002.

Gulf War Veterans

21. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Government's new beginning policy for Gulf War veterans. [36277]

Dr. Reid: The policy statement "Gulf Veterans' Illnesses: A New Beginning" which was published last July set out three fundamental principles which underpin the Government's approach to this issue: first, that all Gulf veterans will have prompt access to medical advice from the MOD's Medical Assessment Programme (MAP); second, there will be appropriate research into veterans' illnesses and factors which might have a bearing on these; and third, the MOD will make available to the public any information it possesses which is of potential relevance to this issue.

Since last July, considerable progress has been made in implementing measures in these three areas. Additional resources have been made available for the MAP, and the waiting time for new appointments is now within the timescale set out in the New Beginning statement. Additional research to investigate the possible interactions between the medical countermeasures used in the Gulf is now in its preparatory phase and the MOD recently announced funding for a series of clinical tests to be carried out on randomly selected Gulf veterans. Information papers have been published on the background to the use of medical countermeasures, about an incident at the Kuwaiti Girls School at which chemical agent was alleged to have been present and, earlier today, about reports of dead animals in the Gulf.

I have also published today a progress report which sets out in more detail our success in implementing the twenty key points which were listed in last July's New Beginning statement. Copies of this report, and of the report on dead animals, have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest assessment of the possible causes of Gulf War syndrome. [36278]

Dr. Reid: Since returning from the Gulf War in 1991, some UK veterans have become ill. Many believe that this ill-health is unusual and directly related to their participation in that conflict. However, there is still no medical or scientific consensus on this subject and important research is still in progress.

The Government are funding two major epidemiological studies to investigate the health of Gulf veterans and their families. A further epidemiological study into UK Gulf veterans and association with increased illness is being funded by the US Department of Defense. In addition, the Government are funding a programme of clinical tests on a group of randomly selected Gulf veterans and also a research programme to investigate the possible adverse health effects of the combination of vaccines and tablets which were given to British troops in the Gulf to protect them against the threat of biological and chemical warfare.

It would be premature to speculate on the possible causes of Gulf veterans' illnesses before the results of these research programmes become available. We currently expect that preliminary results from some of these studies will appear during 1999.

Women

23. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Government have taken to improve employment opportunities for women in the armed forces. [36279]

25. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress the Government have made in improving employment opportunities for women in the armed forces. [36281]

29. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Government have taken to improve employment opportunities for women in the armed forces. [36285]

Dr. Reid: We are committed to widest possible employment opportunities for women, consistent with the need to maintain the combat effectiveness of our Armed Forces. Women can already serve in 73 per cent. of Naval Service posts and 96 per cent. of posts in the RAF. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced during the Defence Debate on 27 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 615–616, that the number of posts open to women in the Army would increase from 47 per cent. to 70 per cent. as of 1 April this year. We are also reviewing the remaining areas of employment currently closed to servicewomen across all three Services to see whether it is possible to extend employment opportunities still further.

Medical Services (Gulf)

26. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of defence medical services in the Gulf. [36282]

Dr. Reid: Regular Defence Medical Services (DMS) personnel are serving afloat in RN ships deployed to the Gulf Region and ashore in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In addition, regular DMS personnel are deployed to the Gulf Region on a temporary or intermittent basis for particular tasks as necessary. A 25 bed hospital in the UK is at a five days readiness to deploy.

Ministry of Defence Police

27. **Mr. Martin Bell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the role and procedures of the Ministry of Defence Police. [36283]

Dr. Reid: The Ministry of Defence Police is a civilian police force constituted under the Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987. Ministry of Defence Police officers are subject to the same laws and procedures as their Home Department and Scottish Office police colleagues. In common with the rest of my Department, the Ministry of Defence Police have been the subject of a number of reviews in recent times and also stemming from that of Sir Patrick Sheehy. Apart from any considerations arising from the Strategic Defence Review, I have no plans to initiate any further reviews of the role and procedures of the Ministry of Defence Police.

NATO Russia Founding Act

28. **Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the NATO Russia Founding Act. [36284]

Mr. George Robertson: Since the NATO/Russia Founding Act was signed in May 1997, good progress has been made on the agreed areas for consultation and cooperation. The mechanism for achieving this progress is the Permanent Joint Council, which is due to meet again at Ministerial level in May and June when we will take stock of progress against an agreed work plan for 1998. The UK encourages the implementation of the Founding Act to include as much practical activity as possible on the agreed basis of transparency and reciprocity.

Smart Procurement Initiative

30. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Government's smart procurement initiative. [36286]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams).

Chatham Dockyard Workers

31. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the counselling scheme for ex-Chatham dockyard workers he announced in June 1997. [36287]

Mr. Spellar: Since I announced the extended counselling arrangements on 4 June 1997 and up until 26 March, there have been 245 inquiries from former Chatham Dockyard workers to the Radiation Counselling Registry. Of these there have been 233 requests for radiation dose information and 131 applications for counselling. Two hundred and twenty two replies have been made to these requests and 112 persons have been counselled.

Air Training Corps

32. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the future of the air training corps. [36288]

Dr. Reid: I am not aware of any representations having been made to my Department about the future of the Air Training Corps (ATC). As with the other Cadet organisations, this Government greatly value the work of the ATC which helps many young people in the development of such qualities as good citizenship, self reliance and self confidence.

Social Class

33. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will investigate the influence of social class on promotion in, and the composition of the armed forces. [36289]

Dr. Reid: The Government are determined that the Armed Forces should be fully representative of all sectors of the community. Armed Forces careers are therefore open to all suitably motivated and qualified young people with the right talents, skills, and determination. The Government are also committed to the principle that all

personnel are recruited entirely on their individual merits, and that their subsequent careers, including promotion, are governed entirely by merit in comparison with their peers.

Susan Hunter

34. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the case of Susan Hunter. [36290]

Mr. Spellar: The regrettable incident of racial abuse to which Mrs. Hunter was subjected, during a social function held at Oakington Barracks on 9 August 1995, was thoroughly and fully investigated by the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police. After reviewing the evidence, the Army Prosecuting Authority determined that Private Bragg should face trial by District Court-Martial. Private Bragg pleaded guilty to the charges brought against him, and was sentenced to 112 days detention and dismissed from the Service. The sentence reflects the serious and genuine commitment which the Army has to eliminate racism.

The commitment of Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff fully to eliminate racism from the Armed Forces is unequivocal. All three Services have either issued or revised their equal opportunity policies and directives which leave all personnel absolutely clear on where their personal responsibilities lie. Any personnel who continue to practise racist behaviour will be dealt with severely and, depending on the circumstances of the case, dismissed.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to visit the Royal Naval College at Greenwich to discuss its future. [36270]

Mr. George Robertson: Since 1 May I have already visited the Royal Naval College Greenwich twice and I have no immediate plans for a further visit. I continue to keep a very close interest in its future arrangements and I hope that negotiations can be concluded soon, to allow the Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College to take responsibility for the site.

Shoeburyness Training Unit

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce a decision on the proposal to transfer a training unit to Shoeburyness; and if he will make a statement. [36272]

Dr. Reid: I expect to be able to announce, before the summer recess, the findings of the study into the possible relocation of the Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School from its present site in Kent.

Eurofighter

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the cost of the European fighter aircraft. [36280]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 19 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *416*.

Strategic Lift Capabilities

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current UK strategic lift capabilities. [36257]

Dr. Reid: Our Strategic Lift requirement, in terms both of airlift and sealift, has been scrutinised closely in the Strategic Defence Review. This scrutiny has been, of course, informed by my Department's assessment of the adequacy of our currently available assets. No decisions have yet been taken.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what responsibility COMAX has for the payment of the costs of the Ministry of Defence Police at Pendine and other DERA bases; and what are the additional costs of that responsibility. [37908]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency. I have asked the Chief Constable to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Walter Boreham to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 6 April 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the payment of costs for Ministry of Defence Police at Pendine and other DERA bases as this falls into my areas of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Policy Agency.

Negotiations are taking place between COMAX and the Ministry of Defence Policy on the terms and costs of the continued presence of the Ministry of Defence Police at six DERA sites. Until those negotiations are completed I am unable to answer the question. However, the costs for the services now provided meanwhile are being met by COMAX.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the demand from the customers of DERA ranges for depleted uranium firings; and if he will make a statement on the extent to which these facilities have been used to date. [36390]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 26 March 1998]:* Discussions with customers during the land ranges rationalisation study indicated the need to retain a depleted uranium firing capability in the UK. The firing facilities for depleted uranium rounds ats Eskmeals were last used in 1995.

United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for the last available year the (i) running costs (ii) salary costs of the head office, (iii) total and percentage of *(a)* staff, *(b)* salary costs and *(c)* running costs incurred at sites in (1) England and (2) Scotland and (iv) the total budget of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office. [37695]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Clarke to Mr. Alasdair Morgan, dated 6 April 1998:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question concerning several cost and budget issues relating to the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO). As the matters you raise fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the UKHO, I have been asked to reply to you direct.

I should preface this response by pointing out that we have made the central assumption that your question relates solely to the UKHO and not to the Ministry of Defence as well. In addition, as your question contains a number of subsidiary questions, I felt it might aid both clarity and presentation if the information you require is provided in tabular format. Accordingly, the answers to your questions can be found at Annex A to this letter.

By way of amplification, I should just explain that the staff numbers quoted are in fact average figures for the whole financial year 1996/97. The United Kingdom Hydrographic Office is situated at Taunton, Somerset and as you will see, 98.1% of UKHO staff are based there. There are, however, a number of staff—16 in total—housed in Chart Maintenance Units (CMUs). These CMUs are located in major Royal Navy bases throughout the UK. In terms of Scotland there are 4 UKHO staff based in the CMU at Faslane; these are the only UKHO staff located in Scotland as I hope reference to Annex A will explain.

I hope this reply has been of assistance. Please do not hesitate to get in touch should you need any further amplification.

Annex A: The UK Hydrographic Office 1996/97

	Staff		*Expenditure*			*Total expenditure*	
	Number	*%*	*Salary costs (£ million)*	*%*	*Other running costs (£ million)*	*%*	*(£ million)*	*%*
HQ	828	98.10	18.400	98.25	15.022	99.97	33.422	99.02
Other England	12	1.42	0.259	1.38	0.003	0.02	0.262	0.78
Scotland	4	0.47	0.068	0.36	0.001	0.01	0.069	0.20
Total	844	100.00	18.727	100.00	15.026	100.00	33.753	100.00

Britannia

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inspections and safety checks are being made to ensure the Royal Yacht 'Britannia' is protected from *(a)* damage, *(b)* fire and *(c)* deterioration. [37260]

Dr. Reid: BRITANNIA is berthed inside Portsmouth Naval Base and is regularly checked by Base staff and MoD police patrols. She is locked up with access on board strictly controlled. All portable artefacts and many stores, including as much as possible of that which presents a fire hazard, have been removed. Fire, intruder detection and partial dehumidification systems have been installed. The hull and superstructure are washed regularly to help arrest salt corrosion and maintain condition.

Ex-service Men

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *427*, what alterations to the regulations for submission of complaints by ex-service personnel were introduced in October 1997; under what statute; and for what reasons. [37396]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* The Armed Forces Act 1996 amended the Services Discipline Acts (the Naval Discipline Act 1957, the Army Act 1955 and the Air Force Act 1955) to provide a statutory right, for the first time, for ex-Service personnel to submit a complaint to the Defence Council. At the same time, provision was made for a time limit of not less than three months to be prescribed in Queen's Regulations for the submission of complaints from both serving and ex-Service personnel. Prior to this, there was no statutory provision for ex-Service personnel to submit complaints although complaints were accepted for investigation on a discretionary basis. This change was made to ensure that ex-Service personnel were afforded the same rights as serving personnel. Queen's Regulations now provide for a time limit for the submission of complaints of three months from the date of the action complained of. These new provisions came into effect on 1 October 1997.

IT Staff

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current shortfall in established information technology staff, consultant and contractor support posts within his Department; and if he will list the posts by grade indicating for each post how long it has been vacant and when it is expected to be filled. [37483]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* Management of the majority of the Department's civilian staff, including IT staff, consultants and contractor support personnel, is delegated to individual budget areas and agencies. Navy, Army and Air Force personnel are managed by their respective Services. Details of vacancies are not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which projects, not related to the year 2000 compliance problem, are being *(a)* restricted and *(b)* terminated in order to free information technology resources. [37482]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* To date, no projects have been cancelled in order to free IT resources for work on the year 2000 problem. To release resources, some lower priority work has been delayed, either by commencing the work later than planned or by extending the duration of existing projects.

Service Men (Criminal Offences)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving or former members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Regiment

officers in each year since their formation have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged or *(c)* convicted of criminal offences. [37815]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Infantry

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *314–15*, on the infantry; if he will list the peacetime establishments of each of the divisions listed. [37931]

Dr. Reid: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Irish Sea (Ships Logs)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will release the ships logs of vessels engaged in search operations in the Irish Sea on 24 March 1968 and the days following. [37223]

Dr. Reid: Four MOD vessels were involved in the initial three day search for the Aer Lingus Viscount which crashed into the Irish Sea on 24 March 1968. Of these, my Department holds only the log book for HMS Penelope. Extensive searches have not revealed the whereabouts of those of the other three ships involved. I am placing a copy of the relevant pages of this log in the Library of the House.

Departmental Libraries

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future organisation and location of his departmental libraries and their collections. [37608]

Mr. Spellar: There are no plans specifically relating to the organisation or location of departmental libraries overall. Any future plans for the reorganisation, relocation or closure of individual buildings, establishments or sites would take account of existing libraries and their collections.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the disposal of books from his Department's libraries which are regarded as surplus to requirement. [37607]

Mr. Spellar: In accordance with HM Treasury guidelines, it is the Department's normal practice to sell surplus material including library books so as to achieve a return to the public purse. However the department does have delegated authority to make gifts in certain circumstances and as a rule surplus library books have been disposed of in this way. In most instances surplus library books are given to the British Library where they pass into the public domain.

With regard to documents and manuscripts formerly held by MOD which fall within the category of public records under the terms of the Public Record Acts 1958 and 1967, their disposal is the responsibility of the MOD Records organisation in accordance with the routine departmental procedures involving the Inspecting Officer of the Public Record Office. Record material has been and is being transferred to the Public Record Office, Approved Places of Deposit and appropriate Service museums, allowing proper public access under the Public Record Acts.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the departmental committee responsible for advising him on the disposal of books and manuscripts from his departmental libraries. [37605]

Mr. Spellar: There is no committee responsible for advice on the disposal of books and manuscripts from MOD libraries.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the collections of books and manuscripts disposed of by his departmental libraries since 1994. [37606]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Upholder Class Submarines

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the disposal of the four Upholder Class submarines. [38328]

Mr. George Robertson: I am pleased to say that the Government of Canada have today announced their intention, subject to final negotiations, to lease all four of the Upholder class submarines for a period of eight years. Canada has chosen to acquire the submarines via a lease with an option to purchase as this is the most satisfactory solution for them.

During the period of the lease the submarines will still be owned by the UK but Canada will have full and unrestricted use and control of the submarines and will indemnify the UK from any claims that may arise from Canadian operation. At the end of the lease period the Canadian Government will have the option of purchasing the submarines outright. If Canada does not take up this option Canada will dispose of the submarines on our behalf. This arrangement is worth some 610 million Canadian dollars to the UK. Work will be generated for various UK companies in reactivating the submarines and for GEC Marine at Barrow who will be providing technical and logistic support, including the provision of training to Canada.

This opportunity represents the most practical and cost effective manner of securing the future of the submarines and is a strong indication of the close relationship between the UK and Canada. The links between our armed forces are traditionally strong, both bilaterally and within NATO. I hope this deal will lead to further co-operation between the two Navies and enhance Canada's contribution to NATO.

Middle East

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change force levels in the Middle East; and if he will make a statement. [38327]

Mr. George Robertson: We remain fully committed to ensuring that Saddam Hussein honours the agreement he made with the UN Secretary General on 23 February, subsequently endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1154, giving free and unfettered access to UNSCOM and IAEA inspectors. Saddam has complied so far, but access alone is not enough. Saddam has not yet provided the evidence we need to be sure that he has destroyed all his weapons of mass destruction. It is therefore too soon to relax our vigilance or reduce our military capability in the Gulf.

We have been reviewing the composition of our forces to ensure we have the best mix for the job and have decided that as temperatures in the Gulf increase we should deploy additional Tornados to replace the Harrier GR7s embarked on HMS Illustrious, since Tornados are better suited to operations in extreme heat than Harriers operating from aircraft carriers. With the generous agreement of the Kuwaiti Government we will therefore be increasing to 12 the number of Tornados based at Ali Al Salem Airbase in the middle of April. HMS Illustrious will then depart the Gulf, prior to entering a major refit programme in July, which will include a number of enhancements to her capability to conduct joint air operations.

Overseas Training Areas

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what overseas training areas are available to the Army and Air Force for the current year. [37743]

Dr. Reid: During 1998 Army and Air Force collective training and exercises have taken place or are planned to take place in the following countries:

Belgium
France
Greece
Portugal
USA
Slovakia
Australia
Brunei
Fiji
Kenya
Mauritania
Oman
Singapore
Canada
Italy
Netherlands
Spain
Hungary
Slovenia
Bahamas
Botswana
Jamaica
Kuwait
Morocco
Qatar
Denmark
Germany
Norway
Turkey
Poland
Ukraine
Belize
Cyprus
Jordan
Malaysia
Nepal
Senegal.

Training is also carried out on the Ascension Island, in the Falkland Islands and in Gibraltar.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the job description and terms of reference of the new Director of Action 2000. [35101]

Mrs. Roche: The Director's particular responsibilities are:

(a) To provide support to the Chairman of Action 2000 in making an assessment of the state of preparedness of UK business to cope with the Millennium Bug, and developing and implementing programmes to encourage business to make suitable preparations.

(b) To manage the day to day operations of the Company, including the Millennium Bug Campaign, launched on 22 January.

Specific activities and objectives will be determined from time to time by the Chairman.

Media Ownership

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what thresholds her Department uses to determine the levels of concentration of media ownership which would trigger her Department's intervention. [37020]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* Under the newspaper merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973, proprietors of newspapers circulating in the UK must obtain my prior consent to acquire a newspaper or newspaper assets where the total paid-for daily circulation of the newspapers involved is 500,000 or more.

Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, the Director General of Fair Trading keeps a constant eye on United Kingdom markets and has the power to refer a monopoly situation to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for investigation. The legislation defines a monopoly situation as one where a company or group supplies or purchases 25 per cent. or more of all the goods or services of a particular type in the United Kingdom or in a defined part of it.

The limits on broadcast media ownership and cross-media ownership are set out in the Broadcasting Acts, which are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from *(a)* Mr. Rupert Murdoch and *(b)* News International in respect of media shareholdings in the United Kingdom. [37017]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* I have received no such representations.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date she plans to introduce a green commuting plan. [36667]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions circulated to all Departments in September last year a "Guide to Green Transport Plans". My Department is considering how to respond to its recommendations.

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what specific changes to departmental transport arrangements have to date been implemented following the receipt of the Green Transport Plan. [36647]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions circulated to all Departments in September last year a "Guide to Green Transport Plans". My Department is currently preparing green transport plans for key headquarters buildings.

Export Licences

Mr. Blunt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her estimate of the value of defence export licence applications withdrawn since 1 May 1997 after contracts were cancelled by customers due to delay in licence proceedings. [35389]

Mrs. Roche: Between 2 May 1997 and 6 March 1998, 554 applications for Standard Individual Export Licences and 21 applications for Open Individual Export Licences were withdrawn by the applicants. There is no requirement that the applicant should give a reason for withdrawing an application and it is therefore not possible to give an estimate as requested.

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total number of export licence applications processed by the Export Control Organisation in each of the four-week periods used by her Department from 5 April 1997 to that commencing on 7 February 1998, broken down into *(a)* those circulated to other Government departments and *(b)* those not circulated. [36712]

Mrs. Roche: The information is as follows:

Period	*Applications circulated to other Departments according to their policy requirements and completed during the period*	*Applications not circulated to other Departments and completed during the period*
5/4/97–2/5/97	767	191
3/5/97–30/5/97	1,019	425
31/5/97–27/6/97	531	191
28/6/97–25/7/97	677	174
26/7/97–22/8/97	798	131
23/8/97–19/9/97	898	244
20/9/97–17/10/97	692	142
18/10/97–14/11/97	794	184
15/11/97–12/12/97	883	143
13/12/97–9/1/98	662	62
10/1/98–6/2/98	818	137
7/2/98–6/3/98	776	163

This information was taken from the Export Control Organisation's management data, which are compiled in order to monitor performance at processing applications for Standard Individual Export Licences. The performance measures do not apply to applications for Open Individual Export Licences (due to the very wide variations between goods and country coverage of such licences) or licences for exports which are subject to control solely because of United Nations sanctions.

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licence applications were refused by the Export Control Organisation during each of the four-week periods used by her Department from 5 April 1997 to that commencing on 7 February 1998. [36599]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the numbers of applications for Standard Individual Export Licences and Open Individual Export Licences refused in full in each period are as follows:

Applications for individual export licences refused in each 4-week period

Period	*Standard individual export licences*	*Open individual export licences*
5/4/97–2/5/97	8	0
3/5/97–30/5/97	4	0
31/5/97–27/6/97	6	1
28/6/97–25/7/97	2	1
26/7/97–22/8/97	7	0
23/8/97–19/9/97	4	0
20/9/97–17/10/97	13	0
18/10/97–14/11/97	4	0
15/11/97–12/12/97	3	1
13/12/97–9/1/98	11	0
10/1/98–6/2/98	11	0
7/2/98–6/3/98	5	0

This information should be considered in light of my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of applications for export licences were processed by the Export Control Organisation in accordance with their targets as to time in the four week periods beginning *(a)* 3 May 1997 and *(b)* 7 February 1998. [36497]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's management data on processing applications for export licences for these periods, to the nearest percentage point, are as follows.

percentage

	3 May 1997 to 30 May 1997	*7 February 1998 to 6 March 1998*
Applications circulated to other Departments according to their policy requirements and completed within 20 working days	48	56
Applications not circulated to other Departments and completed in 10 working days	41	76

Utility Markets

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what will be the impact of her Department's policy on concurrent powers for the utility regulators and the Office of Fair Trading on the organisation which will make the final decision on investigations concerning the utility markets. [37386]

Mrs. Beckett: The Competition Bill provides for the utility sector regulators to exercise concurrently most of the functions of the Director General of Fair Trading in applying and enforcing the prohibitions in relation to their sectors. As set out in the Green Paper "A Fair Deal for Consumers"[CM3898], the Government believe it is important for the development of sectoral regulation that each of the regulators should be able to exercise concurrent powers in their respective areas.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps the Government have taken to consult local authorities on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment; and if she will publish the representations received. [37391]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* We have been in contact with the Local Government Association, as well as with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices. They have not as yet identified any problems or any need for exceptions. We remain in touch: if any problems do come to light we will of course take account of them. It would not be appropriate for us to publish accounts of these consultations which have been carried out on a private basis. But we have no objection if the Local Government Association wish to publish the correspondence.

Carpet Industry

Mr. Lock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals have been put forward by Russia to *(a)* restrict and *(b)* limit the export from the EU to Russia of carpets and associated products; and what assessment she has made of the impact of such restrictions on the United Kingdom carpet industry. [35950]

Mrs. Roche: In January 1998 Russia announced the intention of imposing quota restrictions with effect from the end of March on its imports of carpets from the European Union, in response to the EU's long standing restrictions on Russia's textile and clothing exports.

However, at negotiations held on 26 and 27 March, the European Commission and Russia agreed to remove all quantitative restrictions maintained on each other's textile trade with effect from 30 April 1998.

Victims of Nazism

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much money has been set aside to pay claims from victims of Nazism for restitution of assets; [36756]

(2) what remedies are available to those who claim unfair treatment in respect of their claims for restitution of assets as victims of Nazism. [36751]

Mrs. Beckett: I wish to make it clear that the Government are revolted by Nazi persecution, and have the greatest sympathy for its victims and their relatives. When the circumstances relating to the confiscation of enemy property and the issues that it raises today were first drawn to my attention and that of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary I was keen to shed as much light on the matter as I could, so a detailed historical analysis of the subject was commissioned from FCO historians.

A first but incomplete draft of the report was produced just before the Nazi Gold Conference, but it required extensive further work and cross-checking for the accuracy and fulness of the information it contained. There is no truth in the suggestion that, as some press reports have implied, publication has been deliberately delayed.

As the report shows, most of the assets seized under the Wartime legislation have either been returned to the original owners or been used to compensate British nationals under the post-War peace treaties.

Treaty signatories undertook to compensate their own nationals whose property was confiscated in the UK. Special provision was made for the relief of those whose property had been confiscated and who had also suffered under the Nazis. But some of the documents examined show that although these schemes were well-intentioned, those who dealt with these matters after the War were sometimes insensitive to the plight of Nazi victims.

The present Government deeply regret this, and I would like to apologise to those individuals and to their relatives and descendants. A different attitude would be expected now.

The general principle must be that confiscated assets placed in the UK by victims of Nazi persecution should be returned to them by the UK where practicable and where claims can be validated.

The inadequacy of many of the records will make this no easy task. So although the Government have decided to set up a claims procedure, they have also accepted the suggestion that a suitable independent individual, with the right stature and experience, should undertake an assessment of the report, consulting all interested parties, and, as a matter of urgency, advise on the form of the scheme the Government should adopt.

To aid this work the Government will publish on the internet a list of the 25,000 names of people for whom some records still exist and are prepared to make available an initial £2 million for the claims procedure. If this sum is not taken up, the balance will be given to an independent body for disbursement to people suffering hardship and who were victims of Nazi persecution.

I have placed copies of the report in the libraries of both Houses.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she received on the impact of the level of sterling on manufacturing when she visited the Caravan Exhibition. [37696]

Mrs. Beckett: I do not recall receiving any representations on the level of sterling during my visit to the Caravan and Outdoor Leisure Show last November.

Post Office

Mr. Reed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has for the future financing and organisation of the Post Office; and if she will make a statement. [38232]

Mrs. Beckett: Following consultations last year with the main interested parties and in the light of the Third Report of the Trade and Industry Committee, I have commissioned the next phase of the review of the Post Office.

Our objective is to establish a framework for the Post Office that will enable it to meet successfully the challenges and opportunities ahead. It is important that we have an effective postal service which meets the commercial and social needs of the country.

The terms of reference of the next phase of the review are:

The Government are committed to the Post Office remaining in the public sector and continuing to provide a universal postal service at a uniform tariff and a nation-wide network of post offices. Against that background, the review will make recommendations on the Post Office's future organisation, structure and financing which will best deliver:

greater commercial freedom to enable it to compete effectively in the UK and overseas; and

improved efficiency, effectiveness and service standards.

The review is to take account of the ways in which overseas competitors and analogous organisations are facing, or being set to face, the challenges of the changing market, and is to consider in particular:

a range of options for partnership with the private sector (such as joint ventures) and for the involvement of employees and customers;

how best to ensure fair competition in postal services;

the role of Post Office Counters in the delivery of Government services; and

the Crown Office conversion programme.

The Government hope to announce their proposals in the Autumn.

In the meantime, to help it meet the challenges that are already evident, I am extending the current limited freedom that the Post Office already has for international joint ventures to the domestic market.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Soames: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list by date the overseas trips undertaken by the Minister for Trade since 18 November 1997. [37828]

Mrs. Beckett: The information is as follows.

Date	
15–24 November 1997	Qatar (MENA summit), UAE and Yemen (Trade Promotion)
1–2 December 1997	Barcelona and Madrid (Trade Promotion)
7–11 December 1997	Poland/Czech Republic/Hungary (Trade Promotion)
12–13 December 1997	Conclusion of WTO Financial Services Negotiations, Geneva
16–18 December 1997	OECD Bribery Convention Paris and Rome (Trade Promotion/Policy)
15–16 January 1998	East-West Conference in Prague
30 January 1998	Hungary (Trade Promotion)
2 February 1998	European Parliament Committee (REX) Brussels
3–6 February 1998	Zimbabwe (Trade Promotion)
27 February-13 March 1998	Australia and New Zealand (Trade Promotion)
29–30 March 1998	General Affairs Council—Brussels
5–9 April 1998	Japan (re-launch of Action Japan) (Trade Promotion)

British National Space Centre

Mr. Swinney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the *(a)* locations, *(b)* running costs, *(c)* salary costs and *(d)* total Government financial assistance to the British National Space Centre. [36235]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* The British National Space Centre (BNSC), located at 151 Buckingham Palace Road, London, leads a partnership of Government Departments and research councils. The centre's direct running costs are funded as follows:

£000

	Running Costs	*Staff Costs*
DTI	277	1,179
MOD	12	129
Meteorological Office	8	15
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	40	102
Natural Environment Research Council	12	52

BNSC co-ordinates civil space expenditure by the partnership estimated in 1997–98 at £200 million. Approximately two-thirds of this expenditure supports European Space Agency programmes.

Export Credit Guarantees

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria are used to assess *(a)* market risk and *(b)* political risk when determining ECGD support for UK exporters; and if she will make a statement. [37008]

Mrs. Roche: When evaluating country or market risk, ECGD analyses factors which impinge on a country's capacity and willingness to meet its external debt commitments. Factors include the external debt burden of the economy and how it is likely to evolve over time as well as the country's ability to withstand internal and external economic shocks. A country's vulnerability to political risks such as civil wars, coups, etc. is also assessed when determining ECGD's support.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment is made of a country's human rights record when allocating ECGD support for United Kingdom exporters; and if she will make a statement. [37009]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD's function is to underwrite payment risks associated with capital goods and project exports. Where an export licence is required, ECGD cover will become effective only on condition that the exporter has obtained the licence.

In his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out the criteria used in considering applications for licences to export goods entered in Part III of the Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, and licence applications for the export of dual-use goods where there are grounds for believing that the end-user of such goods will be the armed forces or the internal security forces of the recipient country.

Research Councils

Mr. Swinney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the *(a)* locations, *(b)* running costs, *(c)* salary costs and *(d)* total Government financial assistance to (i) the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, (ii) the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, (iii) the Economic and Social Research Council, (iv) the Medical Research Council, (v) the Natural Environment Research Council, (vi) the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council and (vii) the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils; and what percentage of staff are based in (1) England and (2) Scotland. [36236]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* Details of the locations of the Research Councils and their research establishments are as follows.

Apart from the MRC (London) and CCLRC (Didcot), the Headquarters of the Councils are all located in Swindon. In addition, Councils, have sites at the following locations:

BBSRC: Aberystwyth, Bristol, Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, Compton (near Newbury), Edinburgh, Harpenden, Norwich, Okehampton, Pirbright, Reading, Roslin, Silsoe, Trecastle (Brecon);

CCLRC: Chilbolton (Hampshire), Warrington;

MRC: Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Didcot, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leicester, London, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Oxford, Southampton, Warrington, Banjul (The Gambia), Kingston (Jamaica);

NERC: Aberystwyth, Banchory, Bangor, Cambridge, Earlyburn, East Kilbride, East Stoke (Dorset), Edinburgh, Eskdalemuir, Exeter, Furzebrook (Dorset), Hartland, Keyworth, Oban, Oxford, Penrhos, Plymouth, Southampton, Staylittle (Wales), Tan Hinon (Powys), Tulloch Lodge, Wallingford, the Wirral, Windermere;

PPARC: Cambridge, Edinburgh, La Palma and Hawaii;

EPSRC and ESRC have no establishments other than their Headquarters.

Data on the Councils' running costs and salary costs are not readily available in the form requested. In 1995–96, the last year for which full figures are available, the Councils' total spend on central administration and at their scientific establishments was as follows:

Council	*£ million*
BBSRC	75.018
CCLRC	101.608
EPSRC	18.032
ESRC	6.158
MRC	152.058
NERC	167.870
PPARC	25.603

Details of the total Government financial assistance to each of the Councils from the Science Budget in 1998–99 were given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry on 15 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *271*, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy).

In 1996–97 the percentages of Research Council personnel based in England and Scotland were as follows:

Council	*England*	*Scotland*
BBSRC	84	8
CCLRC	100	—
ESRC	100	—
EPSRC	100	—
MRC	87	13
NERC	85	13
PPARC	69	31
Total	88	10

Further details of Research Councils' spend will be given in the Department's Expenditure Plans Report to be published shortly.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantities of spent fuel have been delivered under contract to Sellafield from Japanese utilities to date; what further quantities of irradiated fuel are due to be delivered to British Nuclear Fuels under the same contracts; and what measures concerning *(a)* physical safety and *(b)* emergency preparations cover such shipments. [37847]

Mr. Battle: Specific details relating to contractual quantities of spent fuel delivered, or still due to be delivered, to Sellafield are a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc and its customers.

United Kingdom companies involved in the transport of nuclear material by sea use ships which meet the International Maritime Organisation's Code for the Safe Carriage of Irradiated Nuclear Fuel, Plutonium and High-Level Radioactive Wastes in Flasks on board Ships (INF Code). All international movements of nuclear material carried out by the United Kingdom comply fully with the requirements of the Convention on the Physical

Protection of Nuclear Material and with the international guidelines on physical protection published by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when BNFL plans to return to Japan the *(a)* low, *(b)* intermediate and *(c)* high level radioactive waste arising from the reprocessing of contracted spent fuel; how many shipments per year are required to return to Japan each category of radioactive waste from reprocessing; what quantities of reprocessed plutonium are planned to be returned to Japan each year; and over what period this return transport is planned to take place. [37848]

Mr. Battle: Since 1976, all British Nuclear Fuels plc new contracts for the reprocessing of overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes. The Government intend that such options should be exercised and that wastes arising from reprocessing be returned to countries of origin.

The detailed arrangements for implementing these waste return options and for returning plutonium are an operational matter for BNFL and its overseas customers in accordance with the terms of the contracts between them.

Electrical Goods

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what preparations her Department is making to meet the requirements of the proposed EU directive on end-of-life procedures for electrical and electronic goods. [37732]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Member States have not yet received the first draft text of the European Commission's proposal for a Directive on end of electrical and electronic equipment. The DTI has, however, commenced discussions with a wide range of industry bodies and other interested parties, as well as with the European Commission, in order to influence the development of the expected Directive. In the context of the Government's Producer Responsibility initiative, the DTI is also encouraging the electrical and electronic equipment industry to take action to increase recovery and recycling levels in this sector.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the environmental efficacy of a deposit system on new electrical white goods, returnable upon responsible disposal at the end of their useful lives. [37733]

Mr. Battle: The application of deposit systems on new electrical white goods, which may involve a refund to the consumer when the appliance reaches the end of its life, is not widespread in Europe. The Department is collecting information on the instances where legislation exists or discussions are taking place to establish such systems, and will be assessing their effectiveness in due course. Within the UK, it is estimated that over 50 per cent. of new white goods are sold with the opportunity to take back the old appliance free of charge.

Coal Miners Pension Funds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the sum which the Government have taken from the coal miners' pension funds *(a)* in total and *(b)* attributable to miners living in Wales; on what basis the money was transferred; when the actuarial advice was given to the Government concerning the proportion of the pension fund which needed to be withheld; and if she will make a statement. [28992]

Mr. Battle: In 1994, prior to coal privatisation arrangements were put in place to safeguard the interests of members of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme (MPS). In exchange for providing a comprehensive guarantee that pension and deferred pension entitlements at privatisation will rise at least in line with the retail price index (RPI), the MPS Trustees agreed that the Government should receive 50 per cent. of any surpluses identified at periodic Scheme valuations. From its share of the Scheme surplus as at 30 September 1996 (identified by the Government Actuary in his report of May 1997) the Government have to date received £113 million. This sum cannot be attributed to any particular regional group within the Scheme membership.

PRIME MINISTER

Hospitality

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list planned expenditure on hospitality for April and May, indicating the date, location and purpose of each event. [35112]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

Media Ownership

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had in the last 10 days under the United Kingdom Presidency of the EU relating to media ownership issues within the EU; what were the purposes of such discussions; and if he will make a statement. [36499]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* None.

Quangos

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Prime Minister how many quangos have been set up since 1 May 1997; what public money each has received; and if he will list each body set up, indicating the number of appointments he has made to each. [36979]

The Prime Minister: Since 1 May 1997, 19 new non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) have been set up. Many of these new bodies are essential in helping the Government to deliver their Manifesto commitments. The bodies are listed, together with the grant or grant-in-aid each has received, and the number of appointments I have made to each. The large majority of bodies are advisory, supported by staff in sponsor departments and do not receive any direct funding.

The Government have abolished 22 NDPBs since 1 May 1997 and are committed to keeping the number of NDBPs to a minimum. Ministers are currently examining

the NDPBs they sponsor with a view to identifying further candidates for abolition.

NDPBs established since 1 May 1997

NDPBs	*Number of appointments made by Prime Minister*	*Grant or grant-in-aid 1997–98 (£ million)*
Better Regulation Task Force	0	—
Civil Justice Council	0	—
Civil Procedure Rule Committee	0	—
Commission for Racial Equality (NI)	0	—
Disability Rights Task Force	0	—
Expert Group on Airborne Particles	0	—
Expert Group on Cryptosporidium in Water Supplies	0	—
Football Task Force	0	[1]0.050
Government Panel on Sustainable Development Education	0	—
Historic Royal Palaces[2]	0	—
New Deal Task Force	0	—
Police Information Technology Organisation[3]	0	—
Potato Development Council	0	—
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority[4]	0	[5]32.572
Royal Commission on Long Term Care of the Elderly	0	—
Security Vetting Appeals Panel	6	—
Skills Task Force	0	—
Spectrum Management Advisory Group	0	—
Treasure Valuation Committee	0	—

[1] £50,000 grant received from the English Sports Council.
[2] HRP took over the functions of Historic Royal Palaces Agency on 1 April 1998.
[3] Established on 1 April 1998.
[4] The QCA was established on 1 October 1997. It replaced the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications which were both wound up on 30 September 1997. The total notional grant-in-aid paid to all three bodies in 1997/98 was £52.27 million (subject to audit).
[5] Notional figure subject to audit.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of *(a)* the Deputy Prime Minister and *(b)* the Minister without Portfolio in respect of (i) advice to him, (ii) initiation of Government policy and (iii) presentation of Government policy. [37037]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. He is chairman of several Cabinet Committees. As Secretary of State he is responsible for the overall direction of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, its policies and their presentation.

My hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio is responsible for the strategic implementation and effective presentation of Government policy and has Ministerial responsibility for the Millennium Experience.

Green Procurement

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what action he is taking under the UK presidency of the EU to promote initiatives on green procurement. [36883]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The environment is one of the UK's key themes for its Presidency. A Communication issued by the European Commission on 11 March "Public Procurement in the European Union" examines, among other things, the role that public procurement can play in protecting the environment. The Communication sets out the Commission's proposal to issue an interpretative document on the issues which arise. The Government will seek to ensure that public purchasers can continue to specify their requirements appropriately.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set a date by which the environmental policy and practice of firms competing for public contracts will become an essential element in the assessment of all bids for Government contracts. [36880]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The Government's policy is that the procurement of goods and services should be based on value for money. In specifying their requirements, departments will take account of the Government's environmental policies and their own "green housekeeping" strategies. In deciding which offer represents best value for money, departments will take account of whole life costs (for example, energy consumption).

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he expects *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Union to take in order to take forward the agreement, set out in the joint Japan-European Union statement of 12 January to expedite stable co-operation on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. [37089]

The Prime Minister: According to procedures set down in the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), it is for the European Commission to negotiate such agreements. The member states of the European Union are currently discussing at working-group level a negotiating mandate that will be issued to the Commission by the Council of Ministers. The UK is keen to make progress on this dossier during the UK Presidency and hopes it will prove possible to reach agreement on the mandate in the Council of Ministers by June.

Briefings

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister when he first established, *(a)* for his office and *(b)* in public, standards relating to (i) the accuracy of information to be provided in briefings and (ii) conduct in answering inquiries for (1) permanent civil servants, (2) appointees and (3) others acting on his behalf; and what subsequent changes he has made to such standards. [37290]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* The duties and responsibilities of civil servants including special advisers are set out in the *Civil Service Code*, in the *Model Contract for Special Advisers* and in the *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service*. The principles governing the employment of civil servants and special advisers have applied under successive Administrations.

Mr. Rupert Murdoch

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the accuracy of *(a)* off the record and *(b)* official (i) briefings and (ii) answers to inquiries given by his office in respect of Mr. Rupert Murdoch's inquiries to his office relating to media investment in Italy. [37292]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* Briefings to the press on this subject have been conducted on the record, by my official spokesman, and on the record in response to telephone inquiries. They have been accurate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister when he was first notified that Mr. Rupert Murdoch wished to discuss the reaction of the Italian Government to News Corporation investment in Italian media; and what transcripts and recordings of articles and broadcasts relating to this subject have been circulated to his staff. [37291]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* It is not my practice to detail confidential discussions with any businessmen about their company, nor to discuss internal government correspondence.

First Home Buyers

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) of 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1287, if he will introduce a scheme to help married couples with the cost of setting up their first home. [37454]

The Prime Minister: I believe that the approach set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement is the right one—it makes support for those caring for children the primary aim, and provides help for families at a time when the financial demands on them are the greatest.

Welsh and Scottish Secretaries of State

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Prime Minister if the Cabinet positions of the Welsh and Scottish Secretaries of State are to be retained after the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly are elected. [37525]

The Prime Minister: The Devolution White Papers—A Voice for Wales (Cm 3718) and Scotland's Parliament (Cm 3658)—made clear that there would be a continuing role for both Secretaries of State after devolution.

Oral Questions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his policy to permit Ministers to supply Labour hon. Members with suggested oral questions. [37403]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* It is for hon. Members themselves to decide on the questions that they wish to raise. If they choose to do so having spoken to other Members, including Ministers, that is a matter for them.

Foreign Policy

Mr. Cash: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those occasions when he has discussed the ethical foreign policy of Her Majesty's Government with (i) the European Commission and (ii) his counterparts in other EU countries. [37769]

The Prime Minister: The UK's approach is well known to our EU partners. At the Luxembourg European Council in December 1997, EU Heads of Government discussed and agreed a declaration on the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have also agreed the importance of making progress on the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 3 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *581*, on ministerial visits, if he will list the references to travel arrangements for *(a)* partners and *(b)* officials accompanying Ministers in (i) the Questions of Procedures for Ministers (May 1992) and (ii) the Ministerial Code (July 1997). [37817]

The Prime Minister: The rules on Ministers' visits, including the size and composition of delegations, are set out in paragraphs 68–86 of the Ministerial Code and 63–81 of Questions of Procedure for Ministers.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his speech to the Midland Bank Conference on the Millennium, how many times and on what dates the Cabinet Sub-committee Misc 4 has met. [37478]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* We have a full programme of action to tackle the computer year 2000 "Millennium Bug". However, in accordance with longstanding practice, information about proceedings of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees is not made public.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received on millennium computer compliance issues. [37960]

The Prime Minister: My office has received approximately 100 letters about millennium compliance issues.

Foreign Heads of State

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the foreign heads of state and heads of Government whom he has met since 1 May 1997, and the city in which each meeting took place. [37572]

The Prime Minister: In addition to the heads I have met at Summit meetings, I have had positive and constructive bilateral discussions with foreign heads of state and heads of government from around 50 different countries from all parts of the work, on at least 90 separate occasions. Just over half of these have been in places other than London.

Strategic Communications Unit

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the work programme completed by the Strategic Communications Unit since its launch on 14 January. [37514]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *254*.

Newspaper Proprietors

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names of newspaper proprietors he has met in 1998, indicating the dates and venues of the meetings. [38107]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) in the House on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 1253.

Contacts With Foreign Leaders

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* the foreign leaders he has contacted on behalf of businessmen since 1 May 1997, *(b)* the contracts involved and *(c)* the dates of the conversations. [37578]

The Prime Minister: It is the job of the British Prime Minister to promote and support British companies abroad. I have done this on many occasions and will continue to do so.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Freedom of Information

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy Lancaster if the proposed legislation on freedom of information will regulate the operation of *(a)* the No. 10 Press Unit and *(b)* the Strategic Communications Unit. [37872]

Dr. David Clark: In common with other parts of Government, both of the Units referred to will fall within the scope of our proposed Freedom of Information legislation.

Absenteeism

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will estimate the rates of absenteeism in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98 to date; and if he will make a statement. [26580]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[pursuant to his reply, 11 March 1998, c. 217–18]:* I regret that the previous reply was misleading in one respect; it showed separately from the Cabinet Office, figures for Her Majesty's Stationery Office. HMSO is no longer an Agency, since the privatisation of the great bulk of it in 1996. Since then, the name HMSO refers to the small residual body supervising Crown Copyright and related matters, which is now incorporated within the Cabinet Office (OPS). Its absenteeism figures should more appropriately have been included within the figures for the Cabinet Office rather than shown separately. For the purpose of this answer the Cabinet Office includes the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service. On this basis the figures are:

Department/Agency	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Cabinet Office	8.7	9.4	7.2
Civil Service College	5.7	8.1	5.9
Security Facilities Executive	3.5	7.6	4.8
The Buying Agency	12.3	14.2	13.5
Property Advisers to Civil Estate	8.7	14.2	8.1
Government Car and Despatch Agency	[1]—	1.2	0.6
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	6.6	7.5	5.6

[1] Not known.

Absence rates represent total days absent divided by total number of staff.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which incidents of paramilitary violence since 1 March the police have indicated to her were attributable to an organisation associated with a party represented at the peace talks; and if she will list the name of the party concerned. [35066]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 March 1998]:* The following number of incidents have been recorded between 1 March and 14 March 1998.

	No.	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Other*
Murder	2	2	—	—
Assault	7	4	3	—
Shooting	3	2	1	—
Bombing	6	4	2	—
Totals	18	12	6	—

There is no evidence at this stage to link any of these incidents to an organisation associated with a party represented at the Talks. As the Government have already made clear any party in breach of the Mitchell principles will be removed from the talks.

Attribution figures are subject to confirmation and possible adjustment.

Confidence-building Measures

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the confidence building measures undertaken to encourage the Unionist community in Northern Ireland since the commencement of the current talks process. [36711]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government are committed to building confidence throughout the community in Northern Ireland. We have considered carefully the views put forward by a wide range of people, including in the Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures, on measures which would benefit the community as a whole. The steps we have taken include: continuing to work towards an agreement in the talks which is supported by a majority of Unionists and

Nationalists, to be put to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum; putting in place all the necessary machinery to ensure that there is no obstacle to the decommissioning of illegal weapons as soon as those holding them accept the need to decommission; the establishment of a Commission on Victims; proposals for the reform of firearms legislation to reflect the local circumstances in Northern Ireland; and proposals for an Equality Commission. We believe that a widely acceptable agreement in the political talks would be the best way to build confidence among both communities.

Driving Instructors

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* qualifications and *(b)* experience are required of driving examiners employed by the Department of the Environment (NI) to conduct check-tests on driving instructors. [36814]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. B. Watson. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. B. Watson to Mr. David Trimble, dated 6 April 1998:

The Minister for the Environment, Lord Dubs, has asked me to reply to your question about the qualifications and experience required of driving examiners.

Examiners who conduct check tests on driving instructors must hold a current category B (motor car) driving licence, which is free of endorsements, and have successfully undertaken both the six-week Driving Traffic Examiners Course and the eight-week Supervision of Approved Driving Instructors Course conducted by the Driving Standards Agency.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will introduce an appeals procedure for driving instructors who fail *(a)* one and *(b)* two check-tests conducted by Department of the Environment (NI) driving examiners. [36815]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There are no plans to introduce additional appeals procedures for driving instructors' check tests. The existing system allows driving instructors three attempts to demonstrate their competence before they are considered by the Registrar for removal from the register, and the Registrar's decision is then subject to appeal. An instructor who is unhappy about any aspects of a check test may also seek redress through the complaint procedure. The cost of additional procedures, which would be time-consuming, cumbersome and unwieldy, could not be justified.

Devolution

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the impact of the devolution proposals on the prospects for establishing an Assembly in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [36867]

Marjorie Mowlam *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The discussion of the Government's proposals for devolution to Scotland and Wales has provided a helpful backdrop to the negotiations on new arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland. The establishment of devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and, I hope, Northern Ireland will open up interesting possibilities for developing the totality of relationships among the peoples of Britain and Ireland.

Bloody Sunday

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if medical records of those persons killed and wounded on Bloody Sunday will be made available to Lord Saville's inquiry. [37177]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Monday 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *378*.

Maze Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will place the report on HMP Maze by Martin Narey in the Library. [37179]

Marjorie Mowlam: The report was placed in the Library on 2 April.

Mr. John Stokes

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the Independent Commission for Police Complaints completed its investigation into the death of Mr. John Stokes; and what were its findings. [37176]

Mr. Ingram: The RUC are investigating this case under Independent Commission for Police Complaints supervision. The investigation is at an advanced stage.

Public Record Office

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in 1998–99. [38203]

Marjorie Mowlam: For 1998/9, the following performance targets have been set out for PRONI:

Financial Performance

1. To meet the challenge of managing the Agency's workload by:

(a) continuing to maintain efficiency, having absorbed a 13.3 per cent. reduction in staff numbers, and having then restructured to fill vacancies more cost-effectively;

(b) providing for an estimated 4 per cent. increase in on-site readers; and

(c) ensuring that expenditure is within the financial limits approved by the Department.

Output

2. To appraise at least 4,500 linear metres of records, including the reappraisal of records so as to eliminate low-grade material.

3. To list and index at least 550 linear metres of records, including ensuring that 100 per cent. of all "open" material is thus processed within one year of receipt.

Quality of Service

4. To maintain extended opening hours.

5. With the help of the computerised document request system, to improve the speed of on-site production to the public by reducing waiting time from 37 minutes to 34 minutes or less in 90 per cent. of cases.

6. To process customer queries within 10 working days of receipt in 90 per cent. of cases and within 14 working days in 96 per cent. of cases, thus maintaining PRONI's Citizen's Charter commitment.

7. To ensure the smooth completion of the annual release for 1999—c. 4,500 records—as well as the on-going release of identified blocks of records at earlier than 30 years.

8. As part of a 10-year storage improvement programme, to survey the conditions in which 10 per cent. of 33,360 metres of records are stored; and, in related exercises, to take remedial action on upgrading c. 1,800 linear metres of records as presently stored on mobile shelving or in plan cases at Balmoral Avenue so as to bring them up to defined standards of archival protection.

9. To provide standards of service which ensure that the number of unsatisfied customers does not exceed 3 per cent. as reflected in signed customer satisfaction questionnaires.

Efficiency

10. To reduce PRONI's composite Unit Cost in the areas of selecting and accessioning, records listing, records storage, document production and reader service, by 3 per cent. from £96.95 to £94.

Land Registers

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for Land Registers of Northern Ireland in 1998–99. [38204]

Marjorie Mowlam: For 1998–99 the following performance targets have been set for Land Registers of Northern Ireland.

Quality

1. To achieve a customer satisfaction rate of at least 98.5 per cent.

2. To achieve a registration accuracy of at least 98.5 per cent.

Efficiency

3. To process regular Land Registry dealings in an average of 14 days.

4. To process regular Registry of Deeds dealing in an average of 4 days.

5. To process regular Statutory Charges Registry dealings in an average of 11.5 days.

6. To process pre-completion land information applications in an average of 5 days.

7. To achieve a weighted unit cost target of £26.13.

Output

8. To process 106 application units per member of staff per month.

Finance

9. To increase overall productivity by at least 1.5 per cent.

10. To cover Agency costs out of fee income.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Millennium Dome (Air Conditioning)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what representations he received from *(a)* the Deputy Prime Minister and *(b)* the Minister for the Environment after deciding to use HFCs to power the air conditioning system within the Millennium Dome. [37252]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *247*. I have had no representations from my colleagues at the DETR, since the Deputy Prime Minister and I both accept that in the particular circumstances of this project the New Millennium Experience Company's preferred option, with stringent safeguards, is the best in the time available.

Millennium Dome Construction Workers (Health)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) if he will list the recorded complaints from workers on the Millennium Dome site in respect of adverse health reactions; [37388]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cause of the recent occurrence of skin complaints among workers on the Millennium Dome site; [37389]

(3) what recent assessments he has made of the health dangers to those working on site at the Millennium Dome. [37390]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) have received two recorded complaints on site. In October 1997, a worker from Watson Steel Limited with blistered lips returned to work after two days' absence. Last month, a worker from O'Rourke Civil Engineering complained of swollen feet. He is no longer working on the site. The Health and Safety Executive have been informed.

The NMEC have also received one verbal complaint regarding a rash to the wrist of two operatives from O'Rourke Civil Engineering. This appears to have been caused by the type of safety gloves used. When the gloves were changed the rash disappeared.

In order to ensure the safety of those working on site, the NMEC are continuing to review health risks as part of an ongoing risk assessment process. They regularly monitor noise levels, and test soil and air samples for potentially harmful substances. Results are well within safety levels as laid down in the Health and Safety Executive guidance 'EH40—Occupational Exposure Limits'. The NMEC will continue to monitor conditions on site.

Millennium Dome (Wind Resistance)

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) what plans the Government have to lift the health and safety restrictions on the insulation material proposed for the Millennium Dome so that it will not have to reach the present standards of wind resistance; [37689]

(2) if he will make a statement on the problems faced by the contractor for the covering of the Millennium Dome with regard to wind resistance. [37694]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) on 26 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns *346–47*.

Millennium Dome (Covering)

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio for what reasons the original contractor for the Millennium Dome covering was not invited to supply the preferred environmentally friendly covering. [37690]

Mr. Mandelson: Koch Hightex submitted tenders to the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) for both PVC and PTFE roof covering. The NMEC concluded, however, that the bid from Birdair for the supply of PTFE represented better value for money.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what arrangements for compensation for the original contractor for the covering of the Millennium Dome have been made; and what sum is involved. [37691]

Mr. Mandelson: Provisions for compensation in the event of termination were contained in the contract between Koch Hightex and the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC). Negotiations are underway between Koch Hightex and the NMEC as to the amount.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Public Opinion Research

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many contracts for public opinion research his Department has awarded since 1 May; if he will indicate the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost, *(c)* value and *(d)* duration of each contract; and which companies (i) bid for and (ii) were awarded each contract. [28879]

Mr. Morley: Contracts for public opinion research commissioned by the Department since 1 May 1997 are as follows:

Perceptions of MAFF: A survey conducted among opinion leaders, journalists, farmers and the general public. Placed with MORI.

Research to assess the effectiveness of the MAFF food safety exhibit at the Good Food Show. The contract was commissioned via the Central Office of Information (COI) who placed the work with Sample Surveys Ltd.

Research to assess the effectiveness of the MAFF Christmas food safety radio campaign. The contract was commissioned via the COI who placed the work with RSGB.

Research to identify the most effective method of communicating nutrition information to teenage girls. Placed with MORI.

Survey of pet owners: To ascertain the increase in importation of pets should guarantee regulations change, and to see if pets would be taken on holiday under a number of difficult import options. Place with DRSM/Framework.

Complementations and conflict between farming and incomers to the countryside in England and Wales. Placed with Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education.

The cost of the surveys totals £310,000.

Animal Growth Promoters

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he intends to take following the new evidence linking the development of antibiotic-resistant superbugs to the use of antibiotics as animal growth promoters. [37270]

Mr. Rooker: No additive is permitted for use in animal feedingstuffs unless it has satisfied criteria for safety and efficacy set out in Council Directive 70/524/EEC. Denmark, Finland and Sweden have provided information in support of unilateral bans on certain antibiotic feed additives. The European Commission is consulting its independent Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition (SCAN) and SCAN's reports will be considered in the Standing Committee for Animal Feedingstuffs.

In the UK, the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) keeps the question of antibiotic resistance under review and its advice will inform the Government's position in EC discussions in Standing Committee on SCAN's reports. We shall support the eventual outcome of those discussions, provided they are based on sound science.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the expenditure under European Communities budget line "B2–5122, Enhancing Public Awareness of the Common Agricultural Policy", in the United Kingdom; which organisations received funding for 1997; what role his Department played in determining the awards; and if he will make a statement. [36947]

Mr. Rooker: The following organisations received funding under B2–5122:

European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) and exchange programme for young farmers (PEJA)—1,000,000 ecu.

Rural Women's Union/European Rural Women's Congress and other organisations of women working in the rural sector—400,000 ecu.

Fund to promote organic agricultural methods in the European Union (IFOAM)—150,000 ecu.

European Network of Alliances for Sustainable Agriculture (REPAS)—150,000 ecu.

Committee of Agricultural Organisations in the EC (COPA)—300,000 ecu.

European Training and Promotion Centre for Farming and Rural Life (CEPFAR), International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), REFAR and CEDIA—800,000 ecu.

Association of Agricultural Education in Europe (Europea)—150,000 ecu.

European Training Association for Farming and Rural Life (AEFPR)—300,000 ecu.

Information for and training of workers, including participation in projects of the European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions within the Community (EFA)—650,000 ecu.

Funding of an information service (rural counselling service). This also covers the helpline for the farming profession ('SOS countryside')—1,500,000 ecu.

Other organisations pursuing the same aims, with particular emphasis on problem areas within Member States and the countries of central and eastern Europe—100,000 ecu.

Responsibility for the administration and allocation of these funds under this budget line rests with the European Commission. This Department plays no part in determining awards.

The Government generally oppose use of EC funds for promotion. This is especially true of the Common Agricultural Policy, which they believe to be in need of fundamental reform and are opposed to any expenditure on promoting it in its current form.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to achieve the UK's objectives in the discussions on the Common Agricultural Policy. [37577]

Mr. Rooker: The Commission's proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy were presented to the Agriculture Council on 31 March. In most respects, these proposals go very much in the direction that the Government have advocated. The Government will progress discussion of them as far as possible during the UK Presidency and will thereafter seek to negotiate an outcome which reflects UK priorities.

Beef on the Bone

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the benefits of lifting the ban on beef on the bone in respect of animals born after a threshold date set after the improvements in safety standards were introduced. [33006]

Mr. Rooker: I assume the hon. Member is referring to cattle born after 1 August 1996, the date on which the mammalian meat and bone meal ban became effective. We considered whether it would be practical to exclude these animals from the provisions of the Beef Bones Regulations 1997 but decided that it would not be possible to identify reliably meat and meat products from such a source once it had entered the human food chain. Of course, the matter will be kept under review, and any decision to lift it will be taken in the light of scientific developments and progress with the eradication of BSE.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to await the outcome of the inquiry of the Agriculture Committee into vitamin B6 before reaching decisions on the retail sale of B6 supplements. [37347]

Mr. Rooker: The draft regulations required to implement the proposed controls on dietary supplements containing vitamin B6 were issued for consultation on 2 April with a deadline for responses of 26 June. If the Agriculture Committee have by then published the results of its inquiry into issues of concern in relation to vitamin B6 we will, of course, take its findings into account when deciding how to proceed.

BSE

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what support groups have been established to assist farmers in respect of the current BSE crisis. [37374]

Mr. Rooker: We are not aware of any support groups established specifically to assist farmers in respect of the BSE crisis. But the Rural Stress Information Network, formed in May 1996, aims to be an authoritative source of information and advice concerning initiatives to alleviate rural stress caused by a variety of factors. This of course includes assistance to farmers affected by the BSE epidemic.

New Technologies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives his Department is taking to assist farmers introducing new technologies in agriculture. [37375]

Mr. Morley: The Department supports roadshows aimed at transferring technology to cereals and grassland farmers, works closely with agricultural levy bodies to ensure that MAFF funded strategic research underpins industry's technological needs, supports with industry LINK programmes promoting pre-competitive research and associated technology transfer, encourages the publication of up-to-date research findings in the farming press and promotes publicity on technology at farming-related exhibitions.

Livestock Subsidies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total payments of financial subsidies to farmers in relation to *(a)* the beef sector and *(b)* the sheep sector in the most recent year for which figures are available. [37297]

Mr. Rooker: Final figures for 1997–98 are still being collected, but the direct subsidies paid in that year are expected to total £613 million to UK beef farmers and £346 million to UK sheep farmers.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made within the EU upon the regulation of genetically modified organisms, including plans for segregation and labelling. [37674]

Mr. Rooker: A comprehensive EU wide framework exists to regulate all activities relating to genetically modified organisms (GMO) providing for the protection of human health and the environment. The principal elements of this are:

(a) the Contained Use Directive (90/219) which controls the use of genetically modified microorganisms in any facility. A proposal to amend this is currently being considered by the European Parliament.

(b) the Deliberate Release Directive (90/220) which controls the release of GMOs into the environment. A proposal to amend this has recently been published by the EU Commission.

(c) the EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97) which controls the use of GMOs in the production of foodstuffs. A Commission proposal setting out detailed rules for the labelling of GM soya and maize is currently being discussed in Brussels and is expected to be agreed shortly.

A requirement to segregate a crop when it has been approved following an extensive safety assessment would contravene World Trade Organisation rules. Companies are however, perfectly entitled to reach commercial agreements with suppliers to obtain GM free materials. A list of non-GM soya suppliers which was published by this Department on 30 March, is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his policy to apply the precautionary principle to the public availability of genetically manipulated foods. [37519]

Mr. Rooker: Genetically modified foods are made available to the public only if they have been approved following a rigorous safety assessment. This assessment is carried out in the UK by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes which always takes a precautionary approach in arriving at its conclusions.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish his response to the EC questionnaire on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy. [37787]

Mr. Morley: The Government have not responded to the European Commission's questionnaire because it was not addressed to Governments.

Correspondence (Quarantine)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the letter of 4 December 1997, Reference 109690, from the Minister of State, on quarantine regulations, what interim recommendations have been received from the Kennedy Committee, in relation to quarantine for pets; what discussions have taken place with the European Commission; and when he expects to bring forward proposals to amend quarantine rules. [36526]

Mr. Rooker: The Advisory Group on Quarantine has not been asked to make, and has not made, interim recommendations. It follows that there has been no discussion of interim recommendations with the European Commission. The Group is expected to report by late Spring, after which the Government will move to full public consultation on the options which then appear most promising. This process is likely to take a further few months. We expect discussions with the European Commission at this stage.

Supermarkets (Surplus Food)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will encourage supermarkets to donate all edible surplus food to charity. [37143]

Mr. Morley: I am confident that the firms concerned have company policies on the disposal of surplus food which take into account the important food safety and public health considerations which arise. A number of them already participate in a voluntary scheme for the distribution of such food to charitable bodies.

Farm Bankruptcies

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farming businesses in England went into bankruptcy during each of the financial years 1989–90 to date. [37507]

Mr. Morley: The data for bankruptcies and company insolvencies are available only for England and Wales combined. I therefore refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to our hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) on 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 658.

Pig Farming

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on the competitiveness of UK pig farming in Europe of the UK's ban on bone meal feed for pig rearing. [37576]

Mr. Morley: An assessment specific to the ban on the use of meat and bone meal (MBM) in pig feed has not been carried out. However, the Department has commissioned ADAS to produce a Report on the competitiveness of the UK pig industry in relation to some of its main competitors in the EU. This will be available shortly. Reactions to the MBM ban in the retail sector and by consumers indicate that producing pigmeat products from non-MBM fed stock presents the industry with a major marketing opportunity.

Organophosphates

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further evaluation he is making of the use of organophosphates; and when he will report on it. [37589]

Mr. Rooker: Ministers have established an interdepartmental high-level group of officials to report on organophosphorus (OP) products. Its terms of reference were to monitor the processes by which information on OP products is shared between Government Departments, to draw together scientific evidence relevant to the policy issues, to advise on whether there are gaps in scientific knowledge, and to examine licensing procedures.

Ministers have recently received the detailed report of the Group and will publish it as soon as possible.

Pesticides

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evaluation he has made of the effects of bromoxynil on infants. [37587]

Mr. Rooker: Bromoxynil is approved as a herbicide for a variety of professional uses in agriculture and horticulture. The compound was reviewed by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides in 1989 following the submission of new data by the approval holder. The review found no grounds for concern about the effects of bromoxynil residues in food on infants.

However, the Committee advised that the new data showed reduced safety margins for those using certain products and the Government took action to restrict exposure to acceptable levels.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he is undertaking on the presence of vinclozolin in wine, fruit and vegetables. [37588]

Mr. Rooker: This Department is not undertaking any specific research projects regarding the presence of vinclozolin in food. However, the Working Party on Pesticide Residues carries out an annual monitoring programme for pesticide residues, including vinclozolin, in food. In the 1998 programme, it is proposed to seek residues of vinclozolin in wine, 8 kinds of fruit, 11 kinds

of vegetables and 7 other commodities. The results of these surveys will be available in the Working Party's Annual Report for 1998, to be published in 1999.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the costs to *(a)* farmers and *(b)* others accruing from pesticide use. [37590]

Mr. Rooker: The direct cost to farmers purchasing pesticide products in 1997 is estimated at about £460 million. In setting price limits for 1995–2000, the Office of Water Services (OfWat) assumed £530 million of capital expenditure on measures to reduce pesticide contamination to meet EC drinking water quality standards. In addition, there will be significant operating costs but these are not identified separately from other treatment programmes. These costs are met by water customers. My hon. Friend will see therefore that a policy of using less pesticides is in everyone's interests.

Farmers Markets

Mr. Soames: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage the establishment of farmers' markets. [37744]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply gave to him on 18 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *719*.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the powers and responsibilities of the Food Standards Agency in respect of *(a)* pesticide clearance and review of clearance, *(b)* pesticide usage, *(c)* clearance and usage of genetically modified crops and *(d)* clearance of genetically modified foods. [37875]

Mr. Rooker: Our proposals on the role and responsibilities of the Food Standards Agency in these areas are set out in the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change" (Cm3830) which was published for consultation on 14 January.

Flood and Coastal Defences

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy in relation to the proposal of the MAFF Working Group that responsibility for flood and coastal defence should be transferred from local authorities to the Environment Agency. [38070]

Mr. Morley: The Government have yet to take decisions on the Comprehensive Spending Review. These are expected to be announced during the Summer.

Food (Veterinary Residues)

Ms Kingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the review of the arrangements for reporting surveys on veterinary residues in food has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [38206]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are committed to informing the public about all food safety matters. Following the changes announced in July last year, I agreed to further improvements in the reporting of surveillance results. To continue to improve openness and information to consumers, the brand names of products tested in veterinary drug residue surveillance exercises will now be published on a regular basis.

The UK has in place a statutory national sampling and surveillance scheme to fulfil its Community obligations to monitor whether veterinary drug residues remain in animal products for human consumption in unacceptable concentrations. This, and a complementary non-statutory programme, is operated by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). Under the programmes some 35,000 samples will be collected in 1998 and subjected to around 50,000 analyses. The VMD reports the results of its surveillance quarterly in the Medicines Act Veterinary Information Service (MAVIS). This will continue and as much information as is available at the time of publication will be presented on positive results in this newsletter. Full information on these will then be presented in the VMD Annual Report on Surveillance for Veterinary Residues, published in July each year. Under the statutory scheme, however, certain information on results that may eventually be the subject of criminal prosecutions will not be able to be published until the necessary investigations have been completed. If, however, an issue of public health arises from a sample or group of samples, the results and any necessary consumer advice will be made public immediately. Under the non-statutory programme, the VMD has developed a special arrangement under which some retailers voluntarily provide a wide range of samples, selected by the VMD, with a complete audit trail. The rest of the programme collects samples under randomised arrangements. This strategy delivers significant efficiencies without compromising the consumer and I have decided that while the results of all samples provided under this scheme must be reported, the brand name of samples collected under these special voluntary arrangements will not. I shall, however, keep this issue under review.

Planned surveys for residues of veterinary drugs will continue to be announced in advance in MAVIS, as has been our practice for some years. However, the sheer scale of the programmes precludes releasing the brands to be sampled in advance. We are committed to giving consumers the maximum possible information on the presence of residues in food and will ensure that this is provided with appropriate advice on the public health significance of any results. Consumers will, therefore, be able to make a more informed choice about the food that they buy. We will, of course, made every effort to ensure the fairness of any tests and not seek to favour, or criticise, one manufacturer or source over another. I am confident that the results will continue to show that the incidence of veterinary drug residues from all sources in food is very low and poses no significant health risk to consumers.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Pay

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people employed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the agencies for which his Department is responsible earn (i) less than £3.20 per hour,

(ii) between £3.20 and £3.60 per hour, (iii) between £3.60 and £4.00 per hour and (iv) between £4.00 and £4.62 per hour. [30749]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 23 February 1998]:* This Department employs six members of staff on annual pay scales which translate into hourly rates between £3.60 and £4.00; and one member of staff on a rate between £4.00 and £4.62.

One member of staff in an Agency is employed on an hourly rate between £4.00 and £4.62.

No full-time staff are employed on salaries below these levels.

Israel

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *100*, on UN Security Council Resolutions, how many of the resolutions concerning aspects of Israel's dispute with its neighbours have been complied with by the Government of Israel. [36632]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* We consider that Israel has complied with the following UN Security Council Resolutions: 108 (1955), 114 (1956), 235 (1967), 350 (1974).

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex on 24 March relating to compliance by Israel with UN Security Council Resolutions. [37746]

Mr. Fatchett: I have replied to the hon. Member today.

European Programmes

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his Department's policy to obtain in consolidated form an annual breakdown from the European Commission of programmes operating in the United Kingdom for the promotion of *(a)* the European Union and *(b)* economic and monetary union. [37094]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Commission provides information on the single market, the Amsterdam Treaty and the single currency under the EU's PRINCE programme. We already receive breakdowns of spending under this programme. The Commission also produces a range of information material on other EU policies and helps fund a variety of information outlets, including the EUROPA internet site, in order to respond to requests for information from the public and from specific groups such as schools or SMEs. No breakdown of this spending by Member State is available.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role and present activities of the Common Foreign and Security Policy working groups on *(a)* global disarmament, *(b)* nuclear non-proliferation, *(c)* OSCE, *(d)* planners, *(e)* protocol, *(f)* security, *(g)* terrorism and *(h)* the United Nations. [37466]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Common Foreign and Security Policy working groups listed meet regularly to discuss topical issues and areas for cooperation within their respective remits.

On the matter of the present activities of the working groups I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on Friday 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *311*.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact of his Department's ethical foreign policy on the Common Foreign and Security Policy Working Group for *(a)* Africa, *(b)* armaments policy, *(c)* Asia, *(d)* Central Europe, *(e)* conventional arms exports, *(f)* Eastern Europe and Central Asia, *(g)* Euro-Mediterranean, *(h)* human rights, *(i)* Mashreq/Maghreb, *(j)* Middle East/Gulf and *(k)* South East Europe. [37467]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) is the central focus for the Government's efforts to promote human rights in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). During our Presidency priority has been given to preparation and co-ordination of EU positions for the UN Commission on Human Rights currently underway in Geneva, and for the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York last month. The effectiveness of the UN's human rights mechanisms has also been discussed.

We have also taken forward human rights-related issues in other CFSP Working Groups, for example:

- in the Conventional Arms Exports Working Group, we have proposed together with France an EU Code of Conduct which will set high common standards for arms exports from all Member States, reflecting the UK's national criteria which state that a licence will not be issued if the proposed export might be used for internal repression or international aggression.
- in the Africa Working Group we are close to agreeing a common position on human rights and good governance in Africa. In March EU Foreign Ministers agreed a common position on Rwanda setting out the criteria, including on human rights, on which the EU will base its contribution to reconstruction and reconciliation.
- the Mashreq/Maghreb Working Group prepared a Troika Ministerial mission to Algeria in January led by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), to further the EU/Algeria dialogue, including on human rights issues.

China (Prisoner)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the punishment procedure in respect of Deng Qilu in Guangdong, China. [37504]

Mr. Fatchett: We are concerned about all cases of maltreatment of prisoners, wherever they occur. We understand that Mr. Deng has now been released by the Chinese authorities.

Human Rights (Persecution of Christians)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the persecution of Christians in *(a)* Egypt, *(b)* China and *(c)* Pakistan. [37676]

Mr. Fatchett: We regularly receive representations from hon. Members, members of the public and Christian organisations, about the situation of Christians in Egypt, Pakistan and China. We have raised these concerns with the relevant authorities and continue to monitor the situation.

European Commission

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a list of the working committees operating in the European Commission indicating *(a)* their terms of reference, *(b)* the United Kingdom representation on them and *(c)* to which directorate-general each is responsible. [37569]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A list of the Committees which assist the Commission in the drafting of Community legislation can be found in the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 1998 (pp 499–521). This is available in the Library of the House.

The committees are listed by subject area, in some cases giving an indication of the directorates-general with which they are connected. The UK is represented on them by officials or appropriate non-Governmental experts. The terms of reference of these committees vary widely. Some were established under Community legislation, some by the Commission under its own powers.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many proposals for legislation originated from working committees in the European Commission in 1997. [37568]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Commission itself has the sole right of initiative for making proposals for Community legislation under the Treaty.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each working group of the European Commission. [37771]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A list of the Committees which assist the Commission in the drafting of Community legislation can be found in the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 1998 (pp. 499–521). This is available in the Library of the House.

Ethical Foreign Policy

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those occasions when he has discussed the ethical foreign policy of Her Majesty's Government with (i) the European Commission and (ii) his counterparts in other EU countries. [37831]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My EU colleagues and the European Commission are well aware of the importance which we attach to a clearer and more effective message on human rights. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has discussed this with them on many occasions.

EU Trade (Southern Africa)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to urge the EU to increase trade with Southern African countries, particularly with regard to farm products. [37563]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In discussions with EU partners on a draft mandate for the renegotiation of the Lomé Convention, we will press for a new trade regime which helps promote the full integration of southern African economies into the world trading system. We will support measures to help these countries increase their capacity to produce and export. We will also press for the elimination of tariffs on goods from Least Developed Countries. In parallel negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement with South Africa, we are pushing for a generous outcome which will boost trade in both directions.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ask the EU to reduce import taxes on goods from Southern Africa. [37564]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Under the current Lomé Convention (which expires in 2000), all industrial goods and a wide range of agricultural products from southern Africa already enter the EU tariff-free. Most other agricultural exports receive preferential access. Negotiations on a successor Convention, including new trade arrangements, begin in September 1998; the EU mandate for these negotiations is under discussion in Brussels. The EU is negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with South Africa which does not benefit from the Lomé trade provisions.

Primary Purpose Rule

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional guidance has been provided to entry clearance officers following the abolition of the primary purpose rule. [37727]

Mr. Fatchett: Entry Clearance posts overseas were sent detailed guidance shortly after the Government announced their intention to abolish the Primary Purpose rule. They were told that, with effect from 5 June 1997, applicants who would formerly have been refused under the Primary Purpose rule alone should be granted entry clearance. They were also reminded that there had been no change of policy in respect of the other requirements of the Immigration Rules.

Bhutanese Refugees

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Governments of Bhutan, Nepal and India with regard to Bhutanese refugees. [37713]

Mr. Fatchett: None. We do not have diplomatic relations with Bhutan. However, our Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi regularly raises with the Bhutanese government our continuing concern about the refugee problem, most recently during a visit to Bhutan in January. Our Embassy in Kathmandu is in touch with the Nepalese Government and the UNHCR on the problem. Our High Commission in New Delhi also discusses the refugees with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. The EU plans to raise the issue at the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Entry Clearance Officers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Diplomatic Service Procedures (Guidance to Entry Clearance Officers) were last updated and re-issued. [37726]

Mr. Fatchett: The main Diplomatic Service Procedures instructions on Entry Clearance, Volume 1 General Instructions, was last updated and distributed in February 1997.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to publish the Diplomatic Service Procedures (Guidance to Entry Clearance Officers). [37725]

Mr. Fatchett: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has already made available a copy of Diplomatic Service Procedures Entry Clearance Volume 1, General Instructions, in the House of Commons Library. This volume is now being substantially revised and on completion will be distributed more widely via the Internet.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who is the United Kingdom representative on the United Nations Human Rights Committee; what representations he has made in response to the recent report by the committee about the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and if he will make a statement. [37983]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom independent expert on the UN Human Rights Committee is Lord Colville. The recent report covering the Royal Ulster Constabulary was by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, to the UN *Commission* on Human Rights. We have submitted its formal response on the Report to the Commission explaining our concerns over its comments on the harassment of defence lawyers, which we are examining closely. A copy of our response will be placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the £1,300 grant to small firms for training employees in millennium compliance in respect of *(a)* how the firms apply, *(b)* what accredited courses qualify, *(c)* when the grant will be paid and *(d)* what firms will qualify; and if he will state the number of firms expected to apply for the grant. [38060]

Dr. Howells: Detailed arrangements will be announced shortly, but it is expected that firms will apply via their local Training and Enterprise Council, in the first instance. The Information Technology National Training Organisation is currently working to devise suitable short training courses which will link into a relevant National Vocational Qualification. The grant will be paid no later than the end of March 1999, and only once the training has been carried out. Small to medium sized firms are eligible to apply. Fuller eligibility criteria will be announced during April. We anticipate that up to 20,000 firms could receive a training grant.

IT Skills (Disabled People)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action his Department will be taking to ensure that people with disabilities are offered the opportunity to re-train, under Government proposals announced on 30 March, to develop the information technology skills necessary to work to adapt systems for the year 2000. [37583]

Dr. Howells: The Government are making £90m available this financial year to help with the capital costs needed to create Centres of Excellence for IT and High Technology Training and to provide help with the set up of costs for facilities needed to allow other skills shortages to be addressed; and to help employers with the training required to tackle the Millennium Bug problem.

Early Years Education

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many bids have been received to set up early years centres of excellence; how many bids it is intended to accept; when the winning bids will be announced; and if he will publish the criteria by which bids will be judged. [37764]

Ms Estelle Morris: We intend to designate 25 Early Excellence Centres in a pilot phase to 1999–2000; the first seven were announced on 1 December 1997. Over 100 proposals have been received for designation in 1998–99. An announcement will be made in the late Spring. The criteria were set out in the Department's letter of 8 August 1997, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

New Deal

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people are eligible to sign up to the New Deal; how many businesses have signed up to support the New Deal; and what is the New Deal's total investment in the Mole Valley constituency. [38161]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have placed in the Library a list of the client volume planning assumptions for each New Deal unit of delivery which the Employment Service is using to plan provision for young people aged 18–24. The table shows that the planning assumption for Guildford unit of delivery, which included the Mole Valley constituency, is that 543 young people could be eligible to join the New Deal in 1998–99.

To date, more than 4,000 employers have signed up to New Deal nationally, of which 15 are specifically from the delivery unit. This number will rise significantly as New Deal is operational in this area from 6 April.

It is not possible to state exactly the total investment in New Deal in the area as New Deal is a client led initiative and sufficient funds will be made available to meet the needs of all those eligible.

WALES

Gwent Tertiary College

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *455*, if he will list for each Gwent Tertiary College project title the amount of funding paid out to date and the amount outstanding. [35312]

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 455, if he will list, by project, the reasons for which projects which have received approval for ERDF funding have not proceeded. [35313]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 19 March 1998]:* A list of the ERDF approved applications is given in the table.

No project grant has been claimed on the first six projects and the other eight projects have been withdrawn by the College. A list of ESF applications showing the amounts approved and payments made to date along with details of projects which have been withdrawn by the College is given at annexes 1 and 2.

For each of the projects withdrawn the Department was informed that the College was not in position to make any claims for grant in respect of that project.

Project Title	*Approved*	*ERDF*
Multiskills Workshops for Engineering in the Valley	yes	350,000
Enterprise Unit	yes	64,000
World Class Manufacturing Targets	yes	95,000
Community Enterprise Animators	yes	86,771
GTC Enterprise Development	yes	105,176
Gwentnet/WCM (World Class Manufacturing)	yes	50,000
Creche and Day Nursery—Support Training in Valleys[1]	yes	103,500
ISO 1400 Prog:Supplier Chain Env. Management[1]	yes	65,500
Creche and Day Nursery to Support Training[1]	yes	145,000
Greater Gwent Community Initiative Support[1]	yes	64,992
Young People's Enterprise Centre[1]	yes	39,583
Community Animators[1]	yes	46,666
Mastercrafts Renovations Project[1]	yes	22,553
Resource and Development Business Network[1]	yes	18,380

[1] Projects withdrawn

Annex 1: Gwent Tertiary College list of ESF projects within dossiers 1995–1997

	Project title	*Amount approved or final claim*	*Paid*	*Balance*
952384 UK2	1. EBBW Vale Open Learning Centre 2. Nightriders 3. Engineering training for multiskilled environments	220,924.80	220,924.80	nil
952393 UK2	1. Training for new tourism 2. Rural Tourism	196,830	196,830	nil
962910UK2	1. Modern Engineering skills Lucas JVP 2. Informatics for a Paperless Office 3. Innovative Instruct. Techniques in Auto Cha' 4. Transferable key skills for Junior Managers	186,147	148,917	37,230
962911UK2	1. Adult guidance in the valleys 2. Community Electronics 3. ABE Pillgwenlly 4. ABE in Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly 5. Cybercafe 6. Detached youth workers in The Valleys 7. Engineering Multiskills 8. Heads of The Valley Open Learning Network 9. Mobile IT 10. Mastercrafts 11. Nightriders	682,492	545,993	136,499
962912UK2	1. Clean Technologies 2. Robotics Controlled Tech and Programmable Logic 3. ISW World Class Manufacturing 4. Supplier Chain Environmental Management	360,787	288,629	72,158
962913UK2	1. Hospitality Trades 2. Training for the New Tourism 3. Training for Rural Tourism	282,595	226,075	56,520
973562UK2	1. Support for Community Projects detached Youth Workers	15,412	—	—
	2. Outreach Worker in Blaenau Gwent	9,344	—	—
973656UK2	1. Stagiaries	10,960	—	—
973698UK2	1. Training for New Tourism	103,712	—	—
954135UK3	1. Basic Vocational Training for LTU	78,352.65	78,352.65	nil
964769UK3	1. Construction Multiskilling for LTU 2. Virtual Campus for LTU 3. Mastercrafts 4. Basic Skills Training for Ethnic Minorities 5. Training for Guidance Staff	146,167	117,006	29,161

Annex 1: Gwent Tertiary College list of ESF projects within dossiers 1995–1997

	Project title	*Amount approved or final claim*	*Paid*	*Balance*
964856UK3	1. Community Developers 1 2. Community Project Workers	40,373.74	32,298	8,075.74
954137UK3	1. First Level Vocational Training 2. Middle Level Vocational Training	141,281.55	141,281.55	nil
964770UK3	1. First Level Vocational Training 2. Nightriders 3. Stagiare Training 4. Cybercafe	143,904	115,123	28,781
964773UK3	1. Vocational Counselling and Guidance 2. Careers Choice	28,999	23,198	5,801
964855UK3	1. Community Developers	11,011.02	8,808	2,203.02
965018UK3	1. Careers Choice	2,940	2,352	588
954139UK3	1. Vocational training for people with moderate learning disabilities	78,352.65	78,352.65	nil
954141UK3	1. Vocational counselling and guidance for people with LE'	9,994.59	9,994.59	nil
964771UK3	1. Pre-release personal strategy training for offenders 2. VT in Horticulture for Mental P' 3. Mobile IT Training (Rural) 4. Mobile IT Training (Peripheral)	101,152	80,926	20,226
954136UK3	1. Vocational counselling and guidance for M and W	3,084.75	3,084.75	nil
954138UK3	1. Vocational training in Engineering, Science, IT and Business Studies	21,525	21,525	nil
954213UK3	1. Vocational training in Engineering, Science, IT and Business Studies	17,683	17,683	nil
964772UK3	1. Training for Lone Parents Returning (Treveth) 2. Training for Lone Parents Returning (Abertillery) 3. Training for Lone Parents Returning (EBBW Vale)	39,931	31,144	7,787
964774UK3	1. Counselling and Guidance for Lone Parents	5,289	4,230	1,059
974705UK3	1. Garddy-Y-Bryn	56,618	—	—
	2. Lifelong Learning Restart Skills	64,481	—	—
	3. Changing Focus	48,131	—	—
974721UK3	1. Straight Ahead	44,560	—	—
	2. Guidance for a Good Start	49,540	—	—
974732UK3	1. Goal Post	37,745	—	—
951050UK8	1. Networking Women in Enterprise Development IN	11,276.81	12,798	(1,521.19)
961050UK8	1. Networking Women in Enterprise Development IN	90,103.91	78,237	11,866.91
971050UK8	1. Networking Women in Enterprise Development IN	109,634	82,307	27,327.98
973184UK8	1. Span	7,689	—	—
973185UK8	1. Where	7,689	—	—
961188UK8	1. Pewter	122,488.68	97,990	24,498.68
971188UK8	1. Pewter	160,279	—	—
951383UK8	1. TQ Toolkit	23,684	23,684	nil
951425UK8	1. Training Trainers in Learning to Learn Skills	11,705.09	12,344	638.91
961383UK8	1. TQ Toolkit	89,834	71,867	17,967
961425UK8	1. Training in Learning to Learn Skills	69,154.31	69,154.31	nil
971383UK8	1. TQ Toolkit	65,549	40,859	22,690
971425UK8	1. Training Trainers in Learning to Learn Skills	108,806.03	87,044	21,762.03
973491UK8	1. TELE 21	7,689	—	—
973501UK8	1. Developing Innovation in Small Companies	7,689	—	—
9731791UK8	1. Disco	7,689	—	—
973180UK8	1. Link	7,689	—	—
973183UK8	1. Dragon	7,689	—	—
952293UK8	1. Mobile IT 2. Tredegar Open Learning Centre 3. Adult Basic Education	61,819.64	61,819.64	nil
962291UK8	1. Initial Training for Volunteer Guidance Workers 2. Saturday School Project 3. Construction Skills for Micro SME Building 4. Financial Services Support Training 5. New Management for Changing Work Organisation 6. Mobile Information Shop 7. Working in The Music Industry	160,794	130,280	30,514
972283UK8	1. Initial and Continuing Training for Volunteer Guidance Workers	34,570	—	—
952253UK8	1. Mobile IT	18,016.13	18,016.13	nil

Annex 1: Gwent Tertiary College list of ESF projects within dossiers 1995–1997

	Project title	*Amount approved or final claim*	*Paid*	*Balance*
962352UK8	1. Initial Training for Volunteer Guidance Workers	155,237.99	77,618	77,619.99
962352UK8	2. Advance Training for Guidance Workers			
	3. Pneumatic & Hydraulics—SMEs in Blaenau Gwent			
	4. Pharmaceutical Industry Supplier Chain			
	5. Construction Skills—Micro SME Bld. Firms			
	6. Financial Services Support Training			
972357UK8	1. Gwent Open Learning Centres	20,427	16,341	4,086

Annex 2: Gwent Tertiary College—1997 ESF projects

		Approvals—1997 withdrawn by the college
973561UK2	Initial Training for Volunteer Guidance Workers	33,785
	People in Europe Working Together for Economic R.	24,459
973562UK2	Heads of The Valley Open Learning Centre	117,855
	Nightriders	25,267
	Tredegar Green Action	17,913
973583UK2	Training for ODL Professionals—Pollen	18,607
	Transferable Key Skills for Junior Managers	61,284
	Robotics, Controlled Technology and Programme Log.	97,426
	Pneumatic and Hydraulics—SMEs in Blaenau	31,428
973613UK2	Supplier Chain Environmental Management 150 1	90,093
	Gwent Women into Management	48,273
973614UK2	Engineering Multiskilling	125,712
973656UK2	Integrated Risk Access and Contingency Planning	42,427
	Multi Media Authors	12,571
	Informatics for The Paperless Office	44,988
	Telematics Training for Service Professionals	10,522
973695UK2	Rural Diversification through Tourism	79,184
972283UK8	Mobile Information Shop	10,453
	Financial Services Support Training	48,320
	Saturday School	14,142

Rural Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many rural schools have been closed in each of the local education authorities of Wales since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [36684]

Mr. Hain: In Wales, 170 schools have ceased to be maintained since 1990. Of these 33 were closed, 121 were amalgamated and 16 were the subject of other types of reorganisation. 12 of the schools closed, 20 of the schools amalgamated and 2 of the schools reorganised can be regarded as 'rural'.

Details are given in the tables. 'Rural' schools are shown with an asterisk.

LEA	*School name*	*Implementation date*
County and Voluntary School closures since 1990		
Blaenau Gwent	Brynawel Nursery School	August 1997
Caerphilly	Senghennydd Nursery School	January 1997
Ceredigion	Brongest CP School*	August 1997
Clwyd	Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr CP School*	January 1995
Clwyd	Tynyfelin CP School*	September 1994
Clwyd	Coed Talon	August 1992
Clwyd	Llysfaen Infants & Junior School	April 1992
Clwyd	Derwen VA Primary School	August 1991
Clwyd	Tanyfron County Primary School	January 1991
Clwyd	Bistre Nursery School	July 1990
Clwyd	Gwynfryn CP School	July 1990
Conwy	Ysgol Llwydgoed	September 1997
Dyfed	High Mead Special School*	July 1996
Dyfed	Crugybar CP School	August 1995
Dyfed	Blaenau CP School*	April 1995
Dyfed	Llanddeusant CP School*	April 1995
Gwent	Varteg Junior & Infants School	July 1995
Gwent	St. Felix RC Primary School	August 1994
Gwent	Llangattock-Nigh-Usk Primary School*	August 1993
Gwent	Queens Comprehensive School	September 1991
Gwent	Henllys County Primary School	September 1991
Gwent	St. Dials Infants School	September 1991
Gwent	Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Cwmbran	September 1991
Gwynedd	St. Georges	May 1993
Mid Glamorgan	Cefnpennar Infants School	August 1992
Mid Glamorgan	Pwllgwaun Infants School	July 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Pont Sion Norton County Primary School	July 1990
Powys	Velindre VP School*	August 1993
Powys	Tal-y-Bont-on-Usk Voluntary Primary School*	July 1991
Powys	Bwlchysarnau CP School*	July 1990
South Glamorgan	Lindens Special School	April 1997
South Glamorgan	Maes-y-Coed School	September 1996
South Glamorgan	Maendy County Primary School*	July 1994
County and Voluntary School amalgamations since 1990		
Blaenau Gwent	Dukestown Infants & Junior Schools	August 1997
Bridgend	Plasnewydd Infants & Junior Schools	January 1998
Caerphilly	Cwm Ifor Nursery & Primary Schools	January 1998
Caerphilly	Aberbargoed Nursery & Primary Schools	September 1997
Caerphilly	Fochriw Nursery & Primary Schools	September 1997
Caerphilly	Pontllanfraith Infants & Junior Schools	January 1996
Carmarthen	Brynamman Infants & Junior Schools	September 1997
Clwyd	Cefn Mawr Infants & Junior Schools	March 1997
Clwyd	Alexandra Junior & Infants Schools	January 1996

LEA	School name	Implementation date
Clwyd	Llandrillo yn Rhos Infants & Junior	September 1994
Clwyd	Higherwych & Talwrn Green	September 1992
Dyfed	Overdale & Portfield Special Schools	September 1994
Dyfed	Bury Port County Infants & Copper Works County Infants School	January 1993
Dyfed	Glasfryn & St. Clears County Primary Schools*	September 1992
Gwent	Garndiffaith Junior & Infants Schools	September 1995
Gwent	Raglan VC Infants & Raglan County Junior Schools*	September 1995
Gwent	Castle Hill & Mountain Special Schools	April 1994
Gwent	Sofrydd Junior and Infants Schools	September 1992
Gwent	St. Mary's Junior & Infants Schools	September 1992
Gwent	Maindee Junior & Infants Schools	September 1992
Gwent	Mitchell Troy County Primary, Overmonnow VC Junior & Overmonnow County Infants Schools	September 1991
Gwent	Cross Ash, Brynderi, Grosmont, Nortons Cross, Llangattock-vibon-Awel County Primary Schools and Llanddewi Rhydderch VC Primary School*	September 1991
Gwent	Beaufort Hill Infants & Beaufort Hill Junior Schools	September 1991
Gwent	Ty Isaf Nursery & Infants Schools	September 1991
Gwent	Risca Town Junior & Infants & Danygraig Junior & Infants Schools	September 1991
Gwent	Gelli Grug Infants, Abertillery Infants & Abertillery Junior Schools	September 1990
Gwynedd	Llanrwst County Junior & Infants Schools	August 1992
Gwynedd	Dolgellau VC Infants & Junior Schools*	September 1991
Gwynedd	Ysgol Gogarth & Ysgol Wern yr Wylan	September 1990
Gwynedd	Maesincа VC Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Coedybrain Infants & Junior Schools	April 1996
Mid Glamorgan	Marlas Infants & Cornelli Junior Schools	January 1996
Mid Glamorgan	Cwm Ifor Infants & Junior Schools	January 1996
Mid Glamorgan	Blaengarw Infants & Junior Schools	January 1996
Mid Glamorgan	Dyffryn Infants & Ferndale Junior Schools	January 1996
Mid Glamorgan	Ysgol Penybont & Heronsbrook Special School	September 1995
Mid Glamorgan	Bodringallt Infants & Junior Schools	September 1995
Mid Glamorgan	Garth Infants & Junior Schools	April 1994
Mid Glamorgan	Maesyfelin Infants & Pontyclun Junior	September 1992
Mid Glamorgan	Glyngwyn & Gwernifor Primary Schools	September 1992
Mid Glamorgan	Hirwaun Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Graig yr Rhacca Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Ynysowen Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Hengoed Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Nantymoel Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Mid Glamorgan	Llanilltud Fardref Junior & Infants Schools	September 1990
Powys	Bettws CIW, Manafan CIW, Pantycrai & Tregynon County Primary Schools*	September 1995
Powys	Gurnos Infants & Junior Schools	September 1991
Powys	Machynlleth Infants & Junior Schools*	September 1991
South Glamorgan	Ysgol St. Baruc & Ysgol St. Francis	September 1995
South Glamorgan	St. Peter's Nursery, Infants & Junior Schools	September 1992
South Glamorgan	Oakfield Junior & Infants Schools	September 1991
Vale of Glamorgan	Holton Road Junior & Infants Schools	September 1997
Vale of Glamorgan	Gibbonsdown Junior & Infants Schools	September 1997
Vale of Glamorgan	St. Illtyd's Infants & Junior Schools	September 1997
West Glamorgan	Dyfatty and Penllergaer Special Schools	September 1995

LEA	School name	Status	Implementation date
County and Voluntary School reorganisations, which involved closures, since 1990			
Caerphilly	Cherry Grove Special School	Closure & establishment of a new school	—
Dyfed	Preseli County Secondary*	Closure and establishment of a new mixed bi-lingual Comprehensive for pupils 11–18	September 1991
Gwent	Nantyglo County Junior & Infants, Brynmawr County Junior & Infants, Winchetown County Infants & Twyncynghordy Nursery	Closure and establishment of new English medium and Welsh medium County Primary Schools	September 1991
Mid Glamorgan	Tremains County Primary	Closure and establishment of Junior & Infants Schools	September 1991
Powys	Cyfronydd Special School*	Closure & change in SEN provision at Brynllywarch Residential School	September 1994
South Glamorgan	Harvey Jones Adolescent Unit	Cease to maintain as a Special School	September 1996
South Glamorgan	Pentwyn, Presswood House and Prewylfa Nursery Special Schools	Closure, establishment of new Special School and change of character to Ysgol Erw'r Delyn Special School	September 1993
South Glamorgan	Howardian High School	Closure and establishment of Tertiary College	September 1990
West Glamorgan	Hengwrt Primary School	Closure and establishment of a mixed Welsh medium school	September 1997

Waste Management

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the *(a)* health and *(b)* other problems caused by the creation of landfill sites in Wales. [37155]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Environment Agency is responsible for regulating landfill sites in accordance with the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It has the lead responsibility to ensure that sites are managed so as to minimise any adverse effects arising from the activities carried out.

I am not aware of any health problems linked to landfill sites in Wales generally. I am aware of allegations made of ill-health being linked to the Nantgwyddon site in the Rhondda. Professor Stephen Palmer of the Welsh Combined Centres for Public Health has investigated the health of residents living near this site. His research identified a higher rate of congenital abnormalities in babies born near to the site, predating the establishment of the landfill facility. His report also identified an unusual cluster of gastroschisis in babies born near to the site since 1991.

The raised incidence of certain health indicators near to the site does not, in itself, establish that the landfill site is the cause of the observed ill-health.

Officials from the Welsh Office have met with those of other Departments to discuss the possibility of a study into ill-health around UK landfill sites. There are a number of technical issues to be resolved before any such study can proceed.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much radioactive waste was imported to Wales in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [37154]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Over the past three years no radioactive waste has been imported to Wales for disposal from outside the UK. The only radioactive waste disposed of which was not generated in Wales was that sent for incineration from users in England.

The radioactivity and quantities involved are given in the following table.

Radioactivity	*1997*	*1996*	*1995*
C-14 + H-3 Activity (MBq)	2.723	122.8784	6,735.313
1-125 + 1-131 Activity (MBq)	—	237.55	909.38
Beta/gamma Activity (kBq)	—	10,252	29,625
Volume (litres)	422.6	4,768	13,479

Notes:
Mbq(Mega-Becquerel); kBq(Kilo-Becquerel).
C-14(Carbon-14); H-3(Tritium); 1-125(Iodine-125); 1-131(Iodine-131).

Children in Care

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to increase the involvement of children in care in decisions relating to their care. [37153]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In 1996, the report of the North Wales Child Care Examination Team made a number of recommendations to improve services for children in care. One was that local authorities should examine the capacity of their services to take account of children's views. It is clear, from monitoring the progress towards implementation, that most authorities now involve children in care in decisions which affect them. However, I recognise that more needs to be done. The Welsh Office is therefore continuing to press all local authorities towards implementing the Examination Team's report; providing core funding for "Voices from Care", a voluntary organisation which represents children in care; funding children's advocacy projects; and making children's advocacy services one of two priority areas for its Children and Family Services Grant Scheme in 1998–99. The Government will be considering what further measures should be introduced in preparing their response to Sir William Utting's review of safeguards for children living away from home.

Rented Housing

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the answer of 27 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *726*, on rented housing, what would be the gross cost to the public sector if all local authority rents in Wales were to be cut by 10 per cent.; and what would be the cost net of savings in housing benefits. [37198]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) on 16 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *500*.

Sporting School of Excellence

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives are being pursued to create a sporting school of excellence in Wales. [37372]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have no plans to introduce DfEE's Sports Colleges initiative in Wales but, as part of the development of the United Kingdom Sports Institute, the Sports Council for Wales is supporting the establishment of a network of sporting centres of excellence which will help to develop Wales' talented young performers. One such example is Glamorgan County Cricket Club's national centre of excellence in Cardiff.

National Flag of Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what occasions the national flag of Wales flies above Ty Gwydyr House. [37377]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is as follows:

Her Majesty's Accession

Birthday of the Duke Of York

St. David's Day

Birthday of the Prince Edward

Commonwealth Day

Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen

Coronation Day

Official Celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday

Birthday of The Duke Of Edinburgh

Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Birthday of The Princess Royal

Birthday of The Princess Margaret

Remembrance Day

Birthday of The Prince Of Wales

Her Majesty's Wedding Day

Also: The day of the opening of a Session of the Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty

The day of the prorogation of a Session of the Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty

On any other occasion where Her Majesty has given a special command.

Farmers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the financial assistance which will be paid to farmers in Wales in relation to *(a)* the beef sector and *(b)* the sheep sector, in the current financial year. [37300]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend will publish, on 7 April 1998, the government's expenditure plans 1998–99, department report, cmnd no. 3915. This will include forecast outturn for the beef and sheep sectors in 1997–98 and plans for 1998–99.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farming businesses in Wales went into bankruptcy during each financial year since 1989–90. [37506]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The data for bankruptcies and company insolvencies are only available for England and Wales combined. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) on 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *658*.

Roads

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what road link schemes his Department is currently evaluating between north and south Wales. [37387]

Mr. Hain: The extent to which improvements are needed to the road network between north and south Wales was one of the main issues raised for consideration in the consultation exercise on the review of the Welsh trunk road programme. Details of the strategy for and role of the programme will be included in the report on the Welsh Trunk Roads Review to be published later this year.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what principles he is basing his review of his trunk road programmes; and if he will make a statement. [38129]

Mr. Hain: In assessing the need for individual road schemes and competing priorities I am taking account of the four factors set out in paragraph 22 of the consultation document I published in July 1997, ie accessibility, economy, environmental impact and safety. This is being done in the context of the development of our wider integrated transport policy which embraces consideration of the future role of the trunk road network, the scope to manage the existing network more effectively and the scope to promote alternative solutions where appropriate. Details of the strategy for and role of the programme will be included in the report on the review to be published later this year.

Second Homes

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage discount on council tax applied to second homes for each local authority area in Wales. [37956]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Under the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (Wales) Regulations 1998, local authorities in Wales have the discretion to apply zero, 25 or 50 per cent. discount on council tax for second homes. For 1998–99, Bridgend, Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham are applying a 50 per cent. discount; all other authorities in Wales are applying a zero discount.

Treatment Costs

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the total cost of treating accidents and other injuries in Wales in the last 12 months. [37318]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information is not collected centrally under these categories. Costs incurred through patients using accident and emergency services of NHS Trusts during 1996–97 were £38.543 million. Information for use of accident and emergency services during 1997–98 will be available from the audited accounts of NHS Trusts in September.

Source:

Financial return from the 1996–97 audited accounts of NHS Trusts.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many health authorities have an osteoporosis strategy in place; and if he will list them. [37308]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The 5 Welsh Health Authorities have policies and strategies which inform their approach to this condition.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of visits and repeat visits to GPs in Wales occasioned by osteoporosis. [37304]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Parc Ty Gwyn, Llanrwst

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if will make a statement on the economic, social and environmental impact of the disposal of the Parc Ty Gwyn site on the town of Llanrwst and the surrounding area. [37755]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh Development Agency recently sold its built property on the Parc Ty Gwyn site to a private sector property investor. It retains ownership of the remainder of the site.

The Agency plans to maintain a close working relationship with the new owner and do all that it can to attract further investment and jobs to the estate. The resources generated by the sale will help the Agency to meet the cost of additional developments in North Wales during the coming year which should further enhance the economic and social development of the region. Any future developments on the site will require planning permission from the local planning authority which will take account of environmental considerations.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Countryside Council of Wales on the disposal of Parc Ty Gwyn; and if he will make a statement. [37756]

Mr. Ron Davies: None. There are no nature conservation issues on this site. It was therefore not necessary to consult the Countryside Council for Wales.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the role of the district valuer in the acquisition, development and disposal of the site known as Parc Ty Gwyn; [37753]

(2) what was the total cost of connecting utilities to Parc Ty Gwyn; [37749]

(3) if he will name the organisations which have expressed an interest in purchasing unsold units at Parc Ty Gwyn; and what is the price of each unsold unit; [37757]

(4) how many industrial units have been built at Parc Ty Gwyn; and at what total cost; [37751]

(5) what proportion of the acquisition cost of Parc Ty Gwyn was paid by the Welsh Development Agency, and which other bodies and organisations contributed to the acquisition; [37747]

(6) what restrictions have been placed on the possible uses of units on the Parc Ty Gwyn site; [37754]

(7) how many full time equivalent jobs *(a)* have been and *(b)* are forecast to be established at Parc Ty Gwyn; [37750]

(8) when the Welsh Development Agency acquired the site known as Parc Ty Gwyn, Betws Road, Llanrwst; and for what price; [37758]

(9) how many industrial units at Parc Ty Gwyn have been sold; to whom each was sold; and at what price; [37752]

(10) when the Welsh Development Agency obtained outline planning approval for the site known as Parc Ty Gwyn; and if he will publish *(a)* the outline and *(b)* the full planning approval for the site. [37748]

Mr. Hain: Issues relating to the acquisition, development and disposal of land and property at the Parc Ty Gwyn site, Llanrwst are operational matters for the Welsh Development Agency. I have therefore asked its chief Executive to write to the hon. Member with the information requested. I shall arrange for a copy of the Chief Executive's letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Air Services

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve air services between Scotland and Europe, with special reference to serving between Scotland and Germany; and if he will make a statement. [37541]

Mr. McLeish: Any improvement of services between Scotland and Europe, including Germany, is a matter for the commercial judgment of airlines and is dependent on the market for such services.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the cost of treating osteoporotic fractures in the last 12 months. [37321]

Mr. Galbraith: No estimate has been made of the cost of treating osteoporotic fractures in the last 12 months.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the projected number of osteoporotic fractures in Scotland in the next 12 months and the number of *(a)* orthopaedic beds and *(b)* days of hospitalisation required to treat them. [37333]

Mr. Galbraith: It is for Health Boards to assess the needs of their resident population and to ensure that services are provided to meet these needs. The Scottish Needs Assessment Programme published a Report on Osteoporosis in April 1997 to assist Health Boards in this task.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of visits and repeat visits to GPs in Scotland occasioned by osteoporosis. [37305]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is not available.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage and number of *(a)* accidents and *(b)* orthopaedic hospital admissions in Scotland are directly attributable to osteoporosis. [37326]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is provided in the table.

It should be noted that the presence of osteoporosis may not always be diagnosed explicitly, since many cases are recorded as common fractures.

Admission criteria in 1997	*Accident*	*Orthopaedics*
Number of admissions during 1997	68,701	76,007
Number of admission in 1997 where osteoporosis was recorded as main diagnostic condition	9	107
Percentage of admissions in 1997 where osteoporosis was recorded as main diagnostic condition	0.01	0.14
Number of admissions in 1997 where osteoporosis was recorded as any main diagnostic condition	734	372
Percentage of admissions in 1997 where osteoporosis was recorded as any main diagnostic condition	1.07	0.49

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many health authorities have an osteoporosis strategy in place; and if he will list them. [37309]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the incidence of osteoporosis; and what estimate he has made of the cost of osteoporosis to the NHS in Scotland in the last 12 months. [37313]

Mr. Galbraith: The Scottish Needs Assessment Programme published a Needs Assessment Report on osteoporosis in April 1997. The Report estimated that, in Scotland, more than 40,000 men and in excess of 200,000 women aged over 50 have osteoporosis of the hip. Information of the estimated cost of osteoporosis to the NHS in Scotland in the last 12 months is not available.

Treatment Costs (Accidents and Injuries)

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the total cost of treating accidents and other injuries in Scotland in the last 12 months. [37320]

Mr. Galbraith: These costs are not separately identifiable. Health Boards in Scotland are given a general revenue allocation to meet the health care needs of their resident population. In 1997–98, Health Boards were given a general allocation of £2,674 million and would have met the cost of treating accidents and other injuries from within this allocation.

Salmon Farming

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evaluation he has made of the effects of ivermectin on salmon fish farming. [37586]

Mr. Macdonald: Ivermectin has been prescribed as a treatment for sea lice infestation of farmed salmon and a number of consents for its use have been granted by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency under control of pollution legislation. In addition, a number of other applications have been referred to my right hon. Friend for possible call-in and these are under consideration. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Rural Schools

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs have been incurred to date by the Highland Council in respect of its consultation process over rural school closures; and if he will make a statement. [37573]

Mr. Wilson: Detailed breakdowns of education authority administration costs are not collected centrally.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account local authorities are required to take, when considering rural school closures, of affected communities already having been included in the Rural Regeneration Programme; and if he will make a statement. [37574]

Mr. Wilson: Local authorities are able to take all matters they consider relevant into account. I wrote to all Scottish Members of Parliament on 24 March 1998 enclosing a copy of a speech I made on rural schools on 21 March 1998.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if all details supplied by farmers for IACS purposes are treated by his Department as confidential documents; [36398]

(2) what measures he proposes to ensure that farm documents supplied for IACS purposes are not supplied by SOAFD to the wrong farms; and how many incidents or disclosure of IACS details have been made by SOAFD to the wrong farms since the scheme was introduced. [36399]

Mr. Macdonald: The information submitted by a farmer as part of his IACS claim is subject to the Data Protection Act 1984 and the common law of confidentiality. The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department will use IACS information only for the purposes of monitoring, evaluation or for research. Details supplied by farmers are released to third parties only with the permission of the original applicant.

There are electronic and manual checks in place whose aim is to ensure that the details supplied for IACS purposes are returned to the correct farmer. The Department have had no formal complaints that data have been sent to the wrong farm and believe that the number of occasions when things do go wrong is minimal.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the safeguards to prevent the importation of *(a)* PCB contaminated and *(b)* other chemically-toxic waste from outside Scotland for landfill disposal in Scotland; and if he will make a statement; [36522]

(2) if he will ban the *(a)* importation and *(b)* landfill disposal of (i) PCB contaminated and (ii) other similar chemically-toxic waste in Scotland. [36524]

Mr. Macdonald: The movement of waste within the UK is not prohibited. In 1994, 45,000 tonnes of special waste was moved from Scotland to other parts of the UK for disposal or treatment, and 6,000 tonnes entered Scotland from other parts of the UK. As regards movements of waste to and from the UK, the United Kingdom Management Plan for the Exports and Imports of Waste bans all imports of waste for disposal except where the exporting country does not have and cannot be expected to provide suitable facilities, and where such facilities are not available closer to that country. The Plan allows most imports of waste for recovery.

Properly managed, landfill is a suitable disposal route for a wide range of waste. I am satisfied that the existing waste management licensing system provides adequate controls over such disposals.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the licences of operators who have, without authorisation, dumped *(a)* PCB contaminated and *(b)* other chemically-toxic waste in landfill sites in Scotland. [36523]

Mr. Macdonald: The Scottish Environment Protection Agency, as regulator, has the power to review and modify waste management licences. The disposal of waste without authorisation is a criminal offence. A licence-holder convicted of such an offence would be liable to have its licence withdrawn.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what powers are available to SEPA to prevent landfill disposal of PCB-contaminated and other similar chemically-toxic waste in Scotland. [36525]

Mr. Macdonald: The keeping, treating and disposal of waste requires a waste management licence (unless it is an exempt activity) granted by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994, as amended. In the case of wastes containing PCBs, guidance on their disposal is available in Waste Management Paper No. 6 and in circular SOAEFD 13/96, which accompanied the Special Waste Regulations 1996. The disposal of waste without authorisation is a criminal offence.

Cairngorm Funicular Railway

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's policy in relation to the proposal to build a funicular railway in the Cairngorms; and if he will make a statement. [38125]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend welcomes investment projects which deliver economic benefits for the residents of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, which deliver value for money in terms of the public sector financial support provided to them and which are consistent with the Government's environmental obligations, both international and domestic. My right hon. Friend and I believe that the proposed Cairngorm funicular railway is such a project.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many admissions were made to the accident and emergency department of each Scottish hospital in *(a)* November, *(b)* December, *(c)* January and *(d)* February during (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [37797]

Mr. Galbraith: Information is not available centrally on the number of attendances at Accident and Emergency Departments on a monthly basis. Data on attendance at Accident and Emergency Departments are recorded centrally at the end of each quarter. Information on the number of new attendances at hospital Accident and Emergency Departments in Scotland for the quarter ending 31 December for the last 3 years and 31 March for the last 2 years is provided in the table. Information for the quarter ending 31 March 1998 is not yet available.

Number of new attendances at accident and emergency departments in Scotland

Hospitals	*3rd Quarter 1995–96*	*4th Quarter 1995–96*	*3rd Quarter 1996–97*	*4th Quarter 1996–97*	*3rd Quarter 1997–98*
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary	12,978	12,390	12,877	12,660	12,711
Aberfeldy Cottage Hospital	164	147	166	165	166
Aboyne Hospital	185	177	183	183	200
Adamson Hospital	826	782	820	789	747
Arbroath Infirmary	2,114	1,961	1,970	1,907	2,055
Arduthie Hospital	227	206	—	—	—
Arran War Memorial Hospital	210	183	219	245	228
Aviemore Health Centre	226	648	421	547	399
Balfour Hospital	453	438	489	436	546
Belford Hospital	1,274	1,362	1,407	1,384	1,528
Belhaven Hospital	—	—	109	126	129
Blairgowrie Cottage Hospital	444	448	423	442	484
Borders General Hospital	2,766	2,559	2,819	2,738	3,078
Brechin Infirmary	319	284	350	353	333
Caithness General Hospital	812	802	870	836	922
Campbeltown Health Centre	440	353	324	331	295
Campbeltown Hospital	610	550	350	607	544
Castle Douglas Hospital	120	203	240	207	—
Chalmers Hospital	1,348	1,204	1,232	1,254	1,186
Coldstream Cottage Hospital	140	160	164	123	22
Cresswell Maternity Hospital	—	—	108	—	—
Crieff Community Hospital	—	—	794	746	674
Crieff Cottage Hospital	702	606	—	—	—
Crosshouse Hospital	11,775	11,719	11,749	11,959	12,485
Daliburgh Hospital	78	64	113	75	92
Davidson Cottage Hospital	701	821	792	1,004	924
Dr. Gray's Hospital	2,718	2,751	3,073	3,115	2,853
Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary	5,680	7,017	5,505	5,656	5,792
Dunbar Hospital	465	391	454	500	590
Dundee Royal Infirmary	10,960	10,209	10,451	10,199	10,297
Dunoon & District General Hospital	1,133	784	1,084	1,227	1,116
Eastern General Hospital	8	12	10	16	—
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary	22,416	21,395	22,331	22,147	22,930
Edington Cottage Hospital	—	—	382	340	323

Number of new attendances at accident and emergency departments in Scotland

Hospitals	3rd Quarter 1995–96	4th Quarter 1995–96	3rd Quarter 1996–97	4th Quarter 1996–97	3rd Quarter 1997–98
Falkirk & District Royal Infirmary	8,804	8,395	8,757	8,686	8,740
Fleming Cottage Hospital	85	92	123	119	106
Forfar Infirmary	728	693	822	684	775
Fraserburgh Hospital	2,253	2,181	2,418	2,603	2,587
Garrick Hospital	1,761	2,277	1,947	1,810	2,117
Gilbert Bain Hospital	1,288	1,369	1,256	1,325	1,309
Glasgow Dental Hospital & School	5,342	5,199	5,233	4,493	5,281
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	17,145	15,998	16,390	16,159	16,734
Hairmyres Hospital	8,712	8,771	8,370	8,307	8,495
Hawick Cottage Hospital	977	528	975	805	991
Hay Lodge Hospital	212	193	956	1,085	448
Huntly Jubilee Hospital	423	374	479	493	493
Ian Charles Hospital	245	199	250	248	204
Insch & District War Memorial Hospital	118	117	122	155	103
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	7,711	7,286	7,369	7,594	7,895
Inverurie Hospital	148	94	185	205	216
Irvine Memorial Hospital	415	291	327	313	329
Islay Hospital	119	96	65	59	135
Kello Hospital	455	414	456	424	477
Kelso Hospital	446	359	435	342	271
Kirkcudbright Hospital	288	172	376	289	—
Knoll Hospital	270	198	245	211	230
Lady Home Hospital	283	258	317	358	363
Lady Margaret Hospital, Millport	145	131	137	151	125
Law Hospital	8,976	8,659	8,719	8,949	9,452
Lawson Memorial Hospital	126	89	153	99	139
Leanchoil Hospital	340	270	282	275	441
Lorn & Islands DGH, Oban	949	848	1,036	1,023	1,047
Mackinnon Memorial Hospital	201	184	142	133	203
Mid Argyll Hospital	554	513	584	541	600
Moffat Hospital	—	28	212	208	—
Monklands District General Hospital	13,369	12,596	13,192	13,100	14,268
Montrose Royal Infirmary	519	499	554	449	625
Nairn Town & County Hospital	460	358	552	389	370
Newton Stewart Hospital	323	377	319	312	—
Ninewells Hospital	1,149	1,147	857	906	985
Perth Royal Infirmary	5,909	5,666	5,885	5,975	6,204
Peterhead Cottage Hospital	1,957	1,865	1,920	1,783	1,845
Portree Hospital	270	243	260	232	257
Queen Margaret Hospital	7,323	7,028	7,435	7,208	7,858
Raigmore Hcspital	4,917	4,915	5,008	5,341	5,286
RHSC, Edinburgh	6,827	6,654	6,168	6,601	6,662
RHSC, Glasgow	8,665	7,795	7,631	8,760	8,824
Roodlands General Hospital	1	—	—	—	—
Ross Memorial Hospital	543	583	498	424	571
Rothesay Victoria Hospital	756	754	865	735	704
Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital	3,602	3,510	3,498	3,727	3,632
Royal Alexandra Hospital	13,272	12,753	12,261	12,490	13,825
Seafield Hospital	430	398	487	413	361
Sister Margaret Cottage Hospital	138	119	129	111	41
Southern General Hospital	9,608	9,476	9,513	9,285	9,124
St. Andrews Memorial Hospital	1,121	1,003	1,076	997	1,059
St. Brendan's Hospital	8	1	12	13	13
St. John's Hospital at Howden	8,742	8,400	8,834	8,703	8,951
St. Margaret's Hospital	315	238	300	328	307
Stephen Cottage Hospital	123	112	153	151	186
Stirling Royal Infirmary	7,662	7,511	7,654	7,567	8,200
Stobhill Hospital	10,809	10,344	10,793	10,766	11,205
Stonehouse Hospital	882	987	959	890	889
Stracathro Hospital	1,179	1,182	1,352	1,341	1,338
The Ayr Hospital	8,942	8,567	9,274	9,176	10,079
Turner Memorial Hospital	433	434	515	512	542
Turiff Cottage Hospital	460	416	455	447	450
Vale of Leven District General Hospital	4,479	4,348	4,429	4,231	3,082
Victoria Cottage Hospital	182	157	—	1	—
Victoria Hospital, Kirkcaldy	7,852	7,888	7,937	8,121	8,469
Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow	16,760	16,212	17,365	17,053	17,338
Western General Hospital, Edinburgh	—	—	4,735	4,145	4,905
Western Infirmary, Glasgow	17,078	16,161	16,374	15,728	16,201
Western Isles Hospital	1,240	1,154	1,154	1,292	931
Woodcot Hospital	—	—	210	243	268
Scotland	320,115	308,654	322,369	320,409	330,790

Note:
p = provisional

Drug Users

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was NHS expenditure in Scotland by trust on services to drug users in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [37798]

Mr. Galbraith: Figures on expenditure by NHS Trust on services to drug users are not held centrally. The table shows expenditure by Health Board on specific services to drug users in each of the last three years. The figures comprise expenditure on the supply of disposable syringes, the needle and syringe exchange scheme and drug abuse projects.

£000

Health Board	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Argyll and Clyde	139	210	408
Ayrshire and Arran	194	298	366
Borders	30	5	14
Dumfries and Galloway	120	166	136
Fife	5	6	5
Forth Valley	73	169	126
Grampian	102	113	153
Greater Glasgow	1,618	1,808	2,190
Highland	107	116	157
Lanarkshire	121	90	231
Lothian	736	1,302	1,213
Orkney	0	26	39
Shetland	9	11	66
Tayside	354	971	952
Western Isles	91	58	50
Total	3,699	5,349	6,106

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland had been on waiting lists for NHS treatment for *(a)* 0 to 3 months, *(b)* 3 to 6 months, *(c)* 6 to 9 months, *(d)* 9 to 12 months and *(e)* over 12 months on (i) 31 March 1998, (ii) 30 September 1996, (iii) 30 June 1996, (iv) 31 March 1996, (v) 30 September 1995, (vi) 30 June 1995 and (vii) 31 March 1995. [37791]

Mr. Galbraith: Information on the number of patients with a guarantee, and the time spent on waiting lists of NHS treatment for the dates rquested in 1995 and 1996 is provided in the table. Data on waiting lists for the quarter ending 31 March 1998 are not yet available.

NHS patients on waiting lists at scottish hospitals: number and time spent on waiting lists

	Time Spent on Waiting List (months)[1]				
	Under 3	*3 to 6*	*6 to 9*	*9 to 12*	*Over 12*
31 March 1995	51,893	15,553	6,639	3,021	1,181
30 June 1995	49,930	16,297	6,917	2,748	1,178
30 September 1995	50,243	16,653	7,619	3,094	1,197
31 March 1996	53,600	16,926	7,272	2,819	130
30 June 1996	50,868	17,536	7,182	2,669	280
30 September 1996	49,595	16,823	7,808	2,692	416

[1] Length of time patients with a waiting time guarantee have waited on the waiting list.

Agency Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by trust *(a)* the number of shifts worked by agency nurses and *(b)* the cost of employing agency nurses for the financial year 1997–98. [37794]

Mr. Galbraith: The answer could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses were recruited by each trust in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98; and how many nurses left each trust *(a)* due to retirement, *(b)* to work for a nursing agency and *(c)* for other reasons in each of those years. [37793]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is as follows:

Nursing staff employed by the NHS in Scotland: net movements by Trust: for year beginning 30 September

	1995/96		*[1]1996/97*	
	[2]Leavers	*[3]Joiners*	*[2]Leavers*	*[3]Joiners*
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	35	35	40	61
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	65	86	74	71
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust	93	87	70	86
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	42	56	31	43
Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust	59	50	51	44
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	75	55	59	77
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	35	36	46	33
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust[4]	102	96	—	—
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	56	46	43	51
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust	41	49	59	51
State Hospital	26	8	14	13
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	56	74	52	54
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	142	97	259	56
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	57	62	58	65
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	111	135	109	105
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	64	116	59	72
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	80	66	68	99
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	145	219	125	166
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	196	185	131	134
Stobhill NHS Trust	100	50	51	46
Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	206	117	144	175
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust	3	3	2	2
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	75	58	74	62
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	23	31	34	19
Highland Communities NHS Trust	80	76	66	84

Nursing staff employed by the NHS in Scotland: net movements by Trust: for year beginning 30 September

	1995/96		[1]1996/97	
	[2]Leavers	[3]Joiners	[2]Leavers	[3]Joiners
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	112	78	64	80
Law Hospital NHS Trust	70	69	42	27
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	104	63	60	42
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	120	205	125	131
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	243	267	211	202
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	236	209	215	161
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	53	108	52	57
Orkney Health Board	15	13	20	8
West Lothian NHS Trust	100	91	80	59
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	328	251	297	237
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	46	42	32	65
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	150	146	135	152
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	93	85	92	81
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	213	216	154	141
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	144	157	138	128
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	88	54	94	245
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	81	68	59	49
Angus NHS Trust	70	60	53	64
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	60	68	62	57
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	67	62	73	76
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	118	102	117	69
Western Isles Health Board Headquarters	25	13	20	22
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	40	52	46	46
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust	52	47	110	55
Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit	30	20	20	21

[1] 1997 data are provisional.
[2] Leavers are defined as registered and enrolled nurses who are no longer employed by the NHS in Scotland or have moved to another NHS Trust.
[3] Joiners are defined as registered and enrolled nurses who have joined the NHS in Scotland or have joined from another NHS Trust.
[4] 1996/97 data for Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust are not available. There are about 160 qualified nurses who do not appear on the 1997 provisional file and as a result the figures for 1996/97 would not reflect the true number of leavers and joiners.
Source:
National Manpower Statistics from payroll ISD Scotland Adhoc ref: 98/11106.

HEALTH

Registration and Inspection Units

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health and local authority registration area in the most recent available year *(a)* the number of registration and inspection officers and other staff, including immediate managers and administrative officers directly concerned with the process, *(b)* the number of units to be inspected in each registration category, *(c)* the number of inspections carried out in each registration category, and the percentage and number of individuals not inspected in accordance with statutory requirements and *(d)* the number of (i) new registrations and (ii) variations to registrations in each category of provision; and if he will set out the overall national totals and average figures in each area. [33830]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of residential care homes and children's homes which local authorities have a statutory responsibility to inspect, and on the number of nursing homes which health authorities have a statutory responsibility to inspect, is provided in a table, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The table also shows total whole time equivalent registration and inspection officers working in local authorities. The other information requested is not available centrally. However, my hon. Friend might like to refer to the Social Services Inspectorate publication "Local Authority Social Services Department Registration and Inspection Units Key Data 1994/1995", copies of which are in the Library, for further limited information on numbers of registration and inspection staff employed by local authorities, for information on the number of inspections carried out and on numbers of new registrations and variations of registrations. The National Health Service Confederation also has some limited information relating to health authorities.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made from statistical returns of health and social services registration and inspection units of the change in their workloads over the last five years. [33850]

Mr. Boateng: None. Some limited information on the workload of social services registration and inspection units is available from a Social Services Inspectorate publication, "Local Authority Social Services Registration and Inspection Units—Key Data 1994/1995", copies of which are in the Library. A revised publication of key data for 1996/97 is due to be published shortly. For information on health authority registration and inspection unit workloads, my hon. Friend might like to contact the National Health Service Confederation which maintains a database on nursing home registration and inspection.

The Government have a manifesto commitment to creating independent regulatory arrangements and aim to reform the organisation of registration and inspection units. The Government's proposals will be set out in the White Paper on Social Services which will be published this summer.

Sjögren's Syndrome

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to help victims of Sjögren's Syndrome; what research is currently being undertaken; and what treatment is available for patients in the North Essex Health Authority Area. [36220]

Ms Jowell: Health authorities are responsible for assessing the needs of their populations and commissioning services to meet those needs. The National Health Service provides a considerable number of services to which people with Sjögren's Syndrome have access, and such patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialties.

The main agency through which the Government support bio-medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC is not currently funding any research into Sjögren's Syndrome. However, the estimated MRC research expenditure on autoimmune diseases was about £980,000 in 1996/97. This itself is underpinned by much basic scientific work in the MRC's extensive portfolio of research on immunity. Total MRC research into infections, immunity and inflammation is estimated at some £60 million for 1997/98.

Sjögren's Syndrome is also classed as a connective tissue disorder. Estimated MRC research expenditure in areas relevant to connective tissue disorders was over £1 million in 1996/97.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment's (COT) 1978 report conclusions regarding vitamin B6. [36458]

Ms Jowell: In 1978 the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) did not produce a report on vitamin B6. However, in its statement on vitamin B6 of June 1997, the Committee did make reference to a 1978 study on the toxicity of vitamin B6 in dogs carried out by Phillips et al.

It is the COT's role to evaluate the scientific evidence on toxicity of chemicals in food and to advise the Government on such matters. We have every confidence in the rigour with which the COT reviewed the data on the safety of vitamin B6.

Fluoridation

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people he estimates are supplied with drinking water to which fluoride has been added. [36841]

Ms Jowell: Some 5.5 million people in the United Kingdom receive water where the fluoride content has been artificially increased to a level of one part of fluoride per million of water.

Anonymous Donor Insemination

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many anonymous donor insemination cycles are currently being performed for a single woman under the licensing control of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [37273]

Ms Jowell: The latest information verified by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is that between 1 August 1991 and 31 March 1996, 4,179 donor insemination cycles involving no male partner were reported to the authority.

Maternity Units and Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital *(a)* maternity units and *(b)* accident and emergency units in (i) the North West of England and (ii) England, have been (1) closed and (2) merged since 1 May 1997. [37282]

Mr. Milburn: Information about the closure or merger of hospital maternity and accident and emergency units is not collected centrally and although general information about the total numbers of accident and emergency units is collated, this does not show how many have been merged or closed. To obtain all the information sought by the hon. Member would incur disproportionate costs.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the sums due to local authorities for the support of asylum seekers in the year 1997–98 under the National Assistance Act 1948, broken down by local authority. [37967]

Mr. Boateng: The table shows the estimated amount of special grant due to local authorities for supporting adult asylum seekers under the 1948 National Assistance Act in 1997–98:

£

Local authority	*Total grant due in 1997–98*
Barking & Dagenham	365,627.92
Barnsley	3,489.20
Barnet	792,668.00
Bedfordshire	33,292.00
Berkshire	524,823.41
Bexley	60,045.00
Birmingham	184,662.22
Bournemouth	12,465.00
Bradford	4,141.72
Brent	2,481,633.90
Brighton and Hove	76,682.74
Bristol City	51,150.22
Bromley	133,420.00
Buckinghamshire	13,055.62
Bury	6,770.00
Cambridgeshire	94,988.00
Camden	2,921,840.00
Cornwall	2,633.50
Corporation of London	95,900.00
Croydon	628,314.45
Derby City	3,357.08
Derbyshire	921.60
Dorset	2,240.00
Ealing	1,565,363.00
East Sussex	3,883.17

£

Local authority	Total grant due in 1997–98
Enfield	231,560.00
Essex	112,649.16
Gateshead	6,360.64
Gloucestershire	7,194.54
Greenwich	495,797.93
Hackney	3,027,990.00
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,406,618.00
Haringey	1,671,951.00
Harrow	748,971.00
Havering	25,900.00
Hereford and Worcester	5,259.11
Hertfordshire	50,283.44
Hillingdon	446,136.00
Hounslow	402,322.29
Islington	1,339,520.00
Kent	279,942.83
Kensington and Chelsea	2,177,140.00
Kingston	145,047.00
Kirklees	4,323.26
Lambeth	3,535,414.00
Leeds City	14,280.00
Leicester City	47,902.52
Lewisham	1,862,381.00
Lincolnshire	28,486.76
Liverpool City	25,023.00
Luton	45,185.57
Manchester	89,687.96
Merton	462,308.79
Middlesborough	19,810.67
Milton Keynes	238,089.62
Newcastle upon Tyne	45,041.63
Newham	2,496,568.00
Norfolk	28,706.00
Northamptonshire	64,120.00
North East Lincolnshire	3,432.90
North Tyneside	7,066.24
Oxfordshire	399,466.00
Portsmouth	8,577.57
Redbridge	422,810.00
Richmond upon Thames	263,852.13
Rochdale	5,193.00
Rutland	980.00
Sheffield	68,575.00
Shropshire	4,064.34
Southampton	6,049.04
South Gloucestershire	3,905.89
Southwark	1,198,810.00
Stockton on Tees	586.50
Suffolk	39,438.00
Sunderland	3,458.43
Surrey	21,086.00
Sutton	115,085.58
Swindon	6,264.00
Tower Hamlets	519,820.00
Wakefield City	3,240.74
Waltham Forest	623,275.82
Wandsworth	585,480.00
Warwickshire	29,540.00
Westminster	3,838,660.00
West Sussex	68,294.52
Wiltshire	8,960.00
York	2,626.14
Total	39,909,937.31

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the actual cost to local authorities of supporting asylum seekers in the year 1997–98, broken down by local authority area. [37968]

Mr. Boateng: Information is unavailable on the actual expenditure incurred by all local authorities in supporting asylum seekers. The tables show the estimated expenditure for the local authorities which have made claims against the three special grants available in 1997/98. Local authorities may have also incurred other costs which have not been included in their grant claims because they are not reimbursable under the terms of the grant. We have no information on the cost for local authorities who have not claimed grant support.

Table 1: Expenditure on adult asylum seekers

£

Local authority	Estimated total expenditure in 1997/98
Barking & Dagenham	365,627.92
Barnsley	3,489.20
Barnet	792,668.00
Bedfordshire	33,292.00
Berkshire	524,823.41
Bexley	60,045.00
Birmingham	184,662.22
Bournemouth	12,465.00
Bradford	4,141.72
Brent	2,481,633.90
Brighton and Hove	76,682.74
Bristol City	51,150.22
Bromley	148,062.38
Buckinghamshire	13,055.62
Bury	6,770.00
Cambridgeshire	94,988.00
Camden	3,514,240.00
Cornwall	2,633.50
Corporation of London	96,080.00
Croydon	628,314.45
Derby City	3,357.08
Derbyshire	921.60
Dorset	2,240.00
Ealing	1,565,363.00
East Sussex	3,883.17
Enfield	271,739.00
Essex	112,649.16
Gateshead	6,360.64
Gloucestershire	7,194.54
Greenwich	495,797.93
Hackney	3,027,990.00
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,406,618.00
Haringey	1,671,951.00
Harrow	748,971.00
Havering	33,124.55
Hereford and Worcester	5,259.11
Hertfordshire	50,283.44
Hillingdon	446,136.00
Hounslow	402,322.29
Islington	1,823,325.00
Kent	279,942.83
Kensington and Chelsea	2,249,217.00
Kingston	145,047.00
Kirklees	4,323.26
Lambeth	3,535,414.00
Leeds City	16,176.00
Leicester City	47,902.52
Lewisham	1,862,381.00
Lincolnshire	28,486.76
Liverpool City	25,023.00
Luton	45,185.57
Manchester	89,687.96

Table 1: Expenditure on adult asylum seekers

£

Local authority	*Estimated total expenditure in 1997/98*
Merton	462,308.79
Middlesborough	19,810.67
Milton Keynes	238,089.62
Newcastle upon Tyne	45,041.63
Newham	2,496,568.00
Norfolk	28,706.00
Northamptonshire	69,362.00
North East Lincolnshire	3,432.90
North Tyneside	7,066.24
Oxfordshire	399,466.00
Portsmouth	8,577.57
Redbridge	468,460.00
Richmond upon Thames	263,852.13
Rochdale	5,193.00
Rutland	1,830.00
Sheffield	68,575.00
Shropshire	4,064.34
Southampton	6,049.04
South Gloucestershire	3,905.89
Southwark	1,598,612.19
Stockton on Tees	586.50
Suffolk	39,438.00
Sunderland	3,458.43
Surrey	21,086.00
Sutton	115,085.58
Swindon	6,264.00
Tower Hamlets	555,260.00
Wakefield City	3,240.74
Waltham Forest	688,417.00
Wandsworth	585,480.00
Warwickshire	33,053.00
Westminster	4,623,193.00
West Sussex	68,294.52
Wiltshire	9,354.92
York	2,626.14
Total	42,500,703.35

Table 2: Expenditure on asylum seekers with children

£

Local authority	*Estimated total expenditure in 1997/98*
Barking	302,452.00
Barnet	1,369,644.00
Bexley	121,413.00
Brent	1,891,193.00
Bromley	292,871.00
Camden	2,072,767.00
Corporation of London	27,812.00
Croydon	463,313.00
Ealing	1,349,911.00
Enfield	1,507,000.00
Greenwich	477,787.00
Hackney	1,330,425.00
Hammersmith	1,783,846.00
Haringey	2,795,085.00
Harrow	623,342.00
Hillingdon	476,915.00
Hounslow	1,207,550.00
Islington	886,156.00
Kensington	1,729,615.00
Kingston	361,895.00
Lambeth	2,232,430.00
Lewisham	1,257,145.00
Merton	518,877.00
Newham	3,849,452.00

Table 2: Expenditure on asylum seekers with children

£

Local authority	*Estimated total expenditure in 1997/98*
Redbridge	1,072,501.00
Richmond	189,471.00
Southwark	1,808,979.00
Sutton	114,054.00
Tower Hamlets	451,794.00
Waltham Forest	1,029,973.00
Wandsworth	1,590,518.00
Westminster	3,547,313.00
Milton Keynes	107,770.00
Manchester	345,460.00
Total	39,186,731.00

Table 3: Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

£

Local authority	*Estimated total expenditure in 1997/98*
Bromley	159,184.00
Corporation of London	29,254.00
Croydon	1,584,569.00
Havering	12,426.00
Hillingdon	1,303,470.00
Kensington & Chelsea	805,731.00
Merton	48,880.00
Westminster	897,163.00
Total	4,867,480.00

Osteoporosis

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of visits and repeat visits to GPs in England occasioned by osteoporosis. [37303]

Ms Jowell: Information on the number of visits made to general practitioners about specific conditions is not collected centrally.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the projected number of osteoporotic fractures in England in the next 12 months and the number of (a) orthopaedic beds and (b) days of hospitalisation required to treat them. [37331]

Ms Jowell: No such estimate has been made.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the incidence of osteoporosis; and what estimate he has made of the cost of osteoporosis to the NHS in England in the last 12 months. [37311]

Ms Jowell: No estimate of the incidence of osteoporosis or the cost of osteoporosis to the National Health Service in England has been made in the last 12 months. In 1995 the advisory group on osteoporosis estimated that osteoporosis affected approximately one in four women and one in twelve men, and cost £742 million a year in England, based on 1992/93 prices.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities have an osteoporosis strategy in place; and if he will list them. [37307]

Ms Jowell: The Department does not hold a list of the health authorities which have an osteoporosis strategy.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has evaluated into the correlation between osteoporosis and social deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [37315]

Ms Jowell: We are aware of the devastating effect that osteoporosis can have on all those who suffer from it, regardless of social class. That is why we have pledged our commitment to tackling the condition through a new strategy on osteoporosis.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage and number of *(a)* accidents and *(b)* orthopaedic hospital admissions in England are directly attributable to osteoporosis. [37324]

Ms Jowell: Information on the number of accidents directly attributable to osteoporosis is not collated centrally. The table shows the number of admissions to National Health Service hospitals in England in 1995–96 (the latest date for which figures are available), where the main diagnosis was osteoporosis and the consultant specialty was 'Trauma & Orthopaedics'. It shows that just over 0.1 per cent. of admissions in that specialty involved a primary diagnosis of osteoporosis.

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined: number of admissions by specialty and primary diagnosis, NHS hospitals in England, 1995–96

	Trauma and Orthopaedics
Admissions with primary diagnosis given as osteoporosis	852
All admissions	750,195
Percentage admissions with primary diagnosis given as osteoporosis	0.114

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of treating osteoporotic fractures in the last 12 months. [37317]

Ms Jowell: The information requested cannot be separately identified.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to implement the recommendation of the Advisory Group on the Ethics of Xenotransplantation in respect of the introduction of primary legislation to regulate xenotransplantation. [37878]

Mr. Boateng: We are considering the results of the consultation exercise held last year relating to the advisory group's recommendations and we will be announcing our response shortly. This will cover the wide range of issues involved including legislation.

In the meantime, the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority, which advises the Government on all issues relating to xenotransplantation, is continuing to monitor closely developments in this field.

Prescription Drugs

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the financial impact on dispensing pharmacies of 90 day pay contracts for prescription drugs; and if he will make a statement. [37378]

Mr. Milburn: A payment representing approximately 80 per cent. of the amount due for dispensing prescriptions is made to community pharmacists on the first day of the month following that which correctly endorsed prescriptions are received for pricing. The balance is paid on the first day of the following month, once prescriptions have been fully processed. This long established payment schedule is one of the factors taken into account in determining overall remuneration for community pharmacy contractors.

Respite Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of respite care; and if he will make a statement. [37610]

Mr. Boateng: The Social Services Inspectorate is currently conducting a special study to establish the availability and quality of short-term breaks. The report of this work, which is intended to help authorities in devising and delivering appropriate and cost effective services, will be available later this year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research underlay the recent estimates of the Minister of State, Baroness Jay, relating to the cost of short-term care breaks based on a legally-based rights system. [37609]

Mr. Boateng: The 1990 General Household Survey estimated that in Great Britain there are 700,000 carers providing 50 or more hours of care a week. The calculation of the cost of short-term breaks quoted by my noble Friend the Baroness Jay of Paddington on 30 March 1998 was based on the cost of providing one day of respite care per month for this number of people, using an hourly cost figure of £4.50. The lower end of the range represents 8 hours of respite care; the upper end of the range represents 24 hour cover. No account in the calculation was taken of the cost of respite care which is currently provided.

Accident Treatment Costs

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total cost of treating accidents and other injuries in England in the last 12 months. [37316]

Mr. Milburn: Figures for the total cost of treatment of accidents and other injuries over the last 12 months are not available. However, a study by the National Health Service Executive published in 1996 entitled "Burdens of Disease" estimated the cost of treating accidents and other injuries to be in the region of £1.2 billion. Copies of this document are available in the Library.

Lead in Water

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he is using to evaluate IQ deficits in relation to the reduction in levels of lead in water. [37580]

Ms Jowell: Approximate estimates of the expected relationship between lead in water and IQ are based on a combination of published models relating lead intake to blood lead levels[1,2] and blood lead levels to IQ.[2]

[1] Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. *Lead in Food: Progress Report.* The 27th report of the Steering Group on Food Surveillance. The working party on inorganic contaminants in food third supplementary report on lead. Food surveillance paper No 27. London: HMSO, 1989.

[2] World Health Organization. *Inorganic Lead.* Environmental Health Criteria No 165. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1995.

Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decision he had made on extending the appointment of existing members of the Board of the Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust beyond October 1998. [37898]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no decisions on extending the appointments of board members whose appointments come to an end on 31 October 1998, nor has he been asked to do so.

Cervical Screening

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to identify barriers to the use of cervical screening services by women living in areas of social deprivation. [37685]

Mr. Boateng: We are determined to tackle health inequalities in the National Health Service. There is some evidence to suggest that take-up of screening invitations is lower among women living in inner city areas than in the population as a whole. In the light of this, the NHS Cervical Screening Programme is commissioning research to assess the factors that influence the uptake of cervical screening among women living in areas of social deprivation and suggest what additional action can be taken to encourage more women in these areas to come forward for screening.

Special Hospitals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently on the waiting list for special hospital places in England and Wales, broken down by county. [37682]

Mr. Boateng: At 31 March 1998 there were 6 people awaiting admission to Ashworth Hospital, 15 people awaiting admission to Broadmoor Hospital and 18 people awaiting admission to Rampton Hospital. The break down by county, based on the home area of those awaiting admission, is set out in the table.

County	*Number awaiting admission*
Berkshire	1
Buckinghamshire	1
Cleveland	1
Derbyshire	1
Essex	1
Gloucestershire	1
Greater London	6
Greater Manchester	1
Gwent	1
Hampshire	2
Kent	2
Leicestershire	2
Lincolnshire	1
Merseyside	1
Northamptonshire	1
Nottinghamshire	2
Powys	1
Surrey	1
Tyne and Wear	1
Warwickshire	1
West Midlands	1
Wiltshire	2
Yorkshire	7

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to establish targets for total months waited by patients; and if he will make a statement. [38062]

Mr. Milburn: We already have a target. Last November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that by 31 March this year we would eliminate 18 month waits for admission to hospital. Provisional management information shows we have delivered this in England and we will make sure we continue to deliver it.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and what proportion of drugs in BNF chapter 2 dispensed in the latest year for which figures are available were *(a)* charged at point of dispensing, *(b)* paid for through a pre-payment certificate and *(c)* dispensed to patients exempt from charges. [38066]

Mr. Milburn: The information is shown in the table:

Prescription items in British National Formulary (BNF) chapter 2, Cardiovascular System, dispensed in England in 1996

	Prescription items (millions)	*Percentage*
Charged at point of dispensing	5.6	6.7
Prepayment certificate	4.0	4.8
Exempt from charge	74.4	88.6
Total for cardiovascular system	84.0	100.0

Note:
This analysis is based on a 1 in 20 sample of all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only.

Access Committee for England

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *180–81*, on the Access Committee for England, what factors underlie his Department's decision to end funding for ACE; when ACE was informed that funding would not be provided for the year 1998–99; and if the same procedures as used in the last two years for giving advanced warning of funding decisions by his Department were followed this year. [37850]

Mr. Milburn: The decision not to renew the Department's funding of the central administrative costs of the Access Committee for England (ACE) under

Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 from 1 April 1998 was taken following a recent inter-Departmental review of Government funding for ACE and was in accordance with our policy of time-limiting core funding for voluntary organisations. The decision was notified to ACE on 12 March 1998, at the same time as other voluntary organisations were notified of Ministers' decisions on their Section 64 grant applications. The usual procedures for the consideration of Section 64 grant applications were followed, and voluntary organisations were notified as soon as Ministers' decisions were reached.

Information Technology

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current shortfall in established information technology staff, consultant and contractor support posts within his Department; and if he will list the posts by grade indicating for each post how long it has been vacant and when it is expected to be filled. [37509]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* There are currently 8 civil servant and 1 contractor vacancies among the Department and its agencies. With one exception, all vacancies have existed for less than 3 months. In all cases it is anticipated they will be filled within 3 months.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which projects, not related to the year 2000 compliance problem, are being *(a)* restricted and *(b)* terminated in order to free information technology resources. [37479]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* There are currently no projects in the Department which, because of the year 2000 compliance problem, are being restricted or terminated in order to free information technology resources.

Child Care

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average cost of childcare in local authority nurseries broken down by region. [36769]

Mr. Boateng: Data are not available centrally on expenditure on local authority day nurseries alone. However, in 1995–96, the latest year for which the data are available, local authorities in England reported having spent £132 million gross on day care in nurseries, both local authority and private. Local authorities had responsibility at 31 March 1996 for some 25,700 children in day nurseries, mostly provided by local authorities, and 29,800 at 31 March 1995. This would imply an average cost to the local authority of approximately £4,700 a year, or about £90 per child per week. The figures for individual local authorities are not reliable enough at this level of detail to enable a robust regional breakdown to be derived; copies of a table showing individual authority figures have been placed in the library.

Food Science Research Contracts

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the food science research contracts allocated by his Department and its agencies in 1997–98 broken down by *(a)* length of contract, *(b)* value of contract and *(c)* institution securing the contract. [37951]

Ms Jowell: The Department funds the following contracts which could be considered to fall under the heading of food science research:

Department of Health food science related research projects: contracts issued in 1997–98

Project title	*Duration*	*Cost (£)*	*Organisation*
Assessment of the degree of heat treatment necessary to destroy *E.coli* O157 in lamb	9 months	59,352	University of Reading
A study using molecular typing methodologies to examine the effect of transport crate re-use and crate washing techniques on the contamination of broiler chickens with *Campylobacter* species	6 months	21,142	Exeter Public Health Laboratory
Investigation of methods of recording and logging food samples submitted for microbiological analysis	6 months	5,971	Preston Public Health Laboratory

In addition, the Department currently funds a Unit at St. Bartholomew's Hospital for research into the toxicology of chemicals some of which can be found in food.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Overpayments

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to improve the recovery of overpaid benefit. [37891]

Mr. Denham: We are transforming the Social Security system into an Active Modern Service that: commands the support and confidence of those who fund it, those who use it, and those who administer it, and provides a better, simpler, more efficient service to clients. As part of this, we are introducing a new overpayment recovery strategy for the Benefits Agency which will ensure that:

causes of overpayments are identified and dealt with;

failures in recovery of overpayment are minimised; and

overpayments are identified, calculated and recovery is effected as quickly as possible.

As part of the new strategy an Information Technology (IT) based Accounting and Management system will be introduced and will serve to strengthen control of overpayments calculation and recovery along with the integrity of the benefits system. This new IT system is designed to: enhance overpayments operations; track overpayments from discovery to recovery; and provide accurate accounting and management information that will be used to identify trends and inform future options for change. It will also help to prevent build up of arrears.

The Government have inherited a large backlog of uncalculated overpayment cases accumulated within the Benefits Agency over a number of years, amounting to approximately 300,000 cases. Some 170,000 of these cases are a combination of departmental error cases where there is no right of recovery and cases that, due to their age, would not be cost effective to pursue or are now impossible to calculate as the documentation is no longer available.

Work on new cases is increasing, partly due to the success of the Security and Control Project in identifying fraud and inaccuracy. Processing this work is being put at risk because of the backlog.

Therefore to assist with the prompt clearance of new work, a large number of non recoverable cases are being cleared from the backlog and special temporary measures taken to speed up processing of newly arising non recoverable cases.

The most cost effective way is to estimate rather than calculate these overpayments. The cases involve an estimated £80 million of nominal overpayments that under normal circumstances the vast majority of which would not be recoverable and some not viable to recover.

Cases involving fraud will be excluded from this exercise.

The new system emphasises our commitment to modernise all areas of the Department's business.

Child Support Agency

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if she will make the tracing of absent parents the primary objective of the CSA; [37068]

(2) what proportion of staff at the CSA have as their primary function the tracing of absent parents. [37066]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are determined to ensure that all absent parents honour their responsibilities to their children. One of our key aims is to increase the proportion of parents meeting their financial obligations to their children after separation. Tracing an absent parent is an integral part of the child support assessment process but the Child Support Agency has dedicated teams who specialise in tracking down absent parents where this is not straightforward. Since its launch in 1993 the Agency's specialist tracing teams have located 269,000 absent parents. Around 7,000 staff are involved in the front-line operations of the Agency's business of whom around 70, work in the dedicated tracing teams.

For this financial year and the next we are directing an extra £15 million to the Agency specifically aimed at increasing the amounts of maintenance that are paid. We are looking closely at all aspects of the Child Support scheme to see where improvements can be made and we expect to bring forward a consultation paper on our proposals later this year.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals are currently being processed under the new procedures relating to the Child Support Agency. [37067]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Independent Tribunal Service have around 4,500 Child Support appeals outstanding including 800 appeals Departure determinations. The Child Support Departures scheme was introduced in December 1996. There have been no recent changes to Child Support Agency appeals procedures although the Social Security Bill does include provisions for streamlining the decision making and appeals processes throughout this Department including the child support scheme.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of men subject to orders for payment have not been traced by the CSA; and if she will make a statement. [36102]

Mr. Field: It is not right that so many absent fathers should seek to avoid paying the maintenance which their children are due. An extra £15 million is to be invested in the Child Support Agency in each of the next two financial years specifically aimed at increasing the amounts of maintenance which are paid.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. Lembit Öpik, dated 2 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about men who have not been traced by the Child Support Agency.

The Agency does not collect details by gender so I am unable to provide information about men, as you request.

When the necessary details are not provided or available, the Agency initiates specialist tracing procedures during the maintenance assessment process to establish the address of the absent parent, the absent parent's employer (where a deduction from earnings order is to be implemented), or the parent with care. It follows, therefore, that absent parents will already have been traced when a maintenance assessment is made or a deduction from earnings order is imposed. If the absent parent changes address after the maintenance assessment has been made or at any time during enforcement action, the Agency will continue to take action to trace his whereabouts.

The Agency does actively pursue absent parents who deliberately evade their lawful responsibility and choose to disappear to avoid paying maintenance. However, it is sometimes the case that despite the Agency's best efforts, a positive result cannot be obtained, as some absent parents will go to extraordinary lengths to avoid their responsibility.

Specialist trace action is suspended where a confident trace is unsuccessful. In such cases, other Government Departments and Agencies are asked to inform the Agency if they become aware of a new address. Also, an annual specialist trace is carried out on suspended cases; this includes making an inquiry to the parent with care.

From its launch in 1993, the Agency has taken on just under 2.4 million cases and completed approximately 385,000 specialist traces during the maintenance assessment process. 269,000 (70 per cent.) of the traces have been successful. These figures relate to the total number of specialist traces carried out. Information on the number of traces relating specifically to absent parents is not available.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will ensure that any parent wishing to have a meeting with Child Support Agency officers is granted one. [36986]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are looking for substantial and sustained operational improvements from the Agency, in particular on getting more maintenance paid, reducing the backlog and improving customer service.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 1 April 1998.

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about parents requesting interviews with Child Support Agency officers.

The Agency offers face to face interviews to both absent parents and parents with care as part of its ongoing commitment to provide a high quality service to its customers.

The facility for face to face interviews is widely publicised by means of:

The Child Support Agency Charter.

The Maintenance Application pack and Maintenance Enquiry pack include notes for parents telling them that they can contact an Agency local office if they want advice or further information.

Parents contacting the Child Support Agency National Enquiry Line are advised of the facility for face to face interviews, where appropriate.

Although most contact between the Agency and its customers is by means of written correspondence or via the telephone, we recognise that a proportion of our customers will need to have face to face contact for a number of reasons. Interviews need not necessarily be carried out at a DSS office, and we are exploring other options, for example, using Citizens Advice Bureaux or other Government facilities to increase our accessibility to the public.

The Agency currently has approximately 2,900 staff working in Field offices throughout the country. However, in excess of 95 per cent. of those staff concentrate on backroom paper processing work so they do not have any face to face contact at all and are no more accessible to the public than those in the major processing centres. The number of staff years which are devoted to face-to-face contact is only currently 120 and in many locations there is fewer than one interview per day. We fully accept that this is not sufficient and restructuring will allow us to offer significantly more face to face contact on a peripatetic basis in a greater range of locations.

As Ministers have announced, part of our strategy to improve face to face contact with our customers is to work more closely with our colleagues in the Benefits Agency. From April 1998, Benefit Agency staff will interview and assist new Income Support parents with care to complete their maintenance application form where appropriate. Pilot studies have shown this to be welcomed by individual customers. 75 per cent. of our parents with care will be interviewed—customers will have to provide information only once, thus reducing overlap and repetition of work and it will reduce the incidence of fraud.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of postage for the Child Support Agency in each year for which figures are available. [36988]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 1 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency postage costs.

Figures are available from the launch of the Agency in April 1993 and are shown below.

Child Support Agency—Postage costs

	£
1993–94	1,044,006
1994–95	1,617,681
1995–96	1,632,721
1996–97	1,902,453
1997–98 (up to 28 February 1998)	1,542,670

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will ensure that agreements between clients of the Child Support Agency and the Agency are recorded in writing with copies forwarded to the client. [36984]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We expect the Child Support Agency to provide a consistent, fair and efficient service to all its clients.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 1 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about agreements between clients of the Child Support Agency and the Agency.

When an agreement to make payments of arrears of child maintenance is made between the customer and the Agency, an officer is required to record the agreement and send both the absent parent and the parent with care a copy of the agreement.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances a case where outstanding arrears exist and the parent with care has a right of appeal can be closed by the Child Support Agency. [36989]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are looking closely at all aspects of the child support scheme to see where improvements can be made. We aim to bring forward later this year a consultation document on our proposals.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 1 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency cases where outstanding arrears of maintenance exist.

Where an absent parent has no liability to pay current maintenance (for example, because the qualifying child has left full-time education) and there are no arrears of maintenance, the case is closed. Decisions such as this concerning maintenance liability or the amount of maintenance liability are made by Child Support Officers, and parents have the right of appeal.

Where liability to pay current maintenance has ended, but there are still arrears of maintenance outstanding, a case remains open and the Agency pursues this until such time as all arrears have been paid. This may involve negotiating an agreement with the absent parent for an amount to be paid regularly until the arrears have been cleared; all aspects of both parent's circumstances are taken into account so that the agreed amount is realistic and balances the needs of both parents. Such agreements may be reviewed should there be a change in the circumstances of either parent.

There is no provision for arrears of child maintenance to be written-off by the Agency. In certain circumstances (for example, the death of a qualifying child) the Agency, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State can use discretion not to enforce arrears due. Where such discretion is exercised, there is not right of appeal.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefit Payment Cards

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the launch of the project to introduce magnetic stripe cards for the payment of benefit; and what are *(a)* the revised launch date, *(b)* the timetable for installing the system in post offices, *(c)* the reasons why chip cards were not included in the project and *(d)* the anticipated reduction of fraud as a result of the project. [37760]

Mr. Denham: The Benefit Payment Card has already been launched and is in use for Child Benefit customers as part of a trial in 205 post offices in the South West and North East of England.

On current plans we expect to begin automating the rest of the Post Offices network next year and all Post Offices should be automated by the end of 2000.

The magnetic stripe card fully meets the requirements for the Payment Card that were set out for prospective contractors for this Private Finance Initiative project. However, the system is fully able to support smart card technology.

Once fully operational, the Payment Card is expected to virtually eliminate fraud at the point of encashment.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which Minister approved the issue of Benefit Integrity Project questionnaires on and after 6 May 1997. [37928]

Mr. Denham: The Benefit Integrity Project including the issue of questionnaires was approved by the previous administration. It formally began with the selection of cases for postal enquiry from 28 April 1997. The first questionnaires were sent out on 6 May 1997.

Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research was undertaken by the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for the report, The Future of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance; and if he will place a copy of this research in the Library. [37841]

Mr. Denham: The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board is an independent statutory body established by the Social Security Act 1991. The Chairman makes it clear in the foreword to the report that the Board based its recommendations on the in-depth study of over 5,000 cases relating to Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance which it saw over a five year period from 1992. These covered a wide range of disabilities and medical conditions. The report was published on 12 March and a copy placed in the Library.

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times and on which matters the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board has been consulted by the Secretary of State since its formation in 1992. [37209]

Mr. Denham: Since its formation in 1992, the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board has been commissioned by the Secretary of State to undertake detailed studies and make recommendations on 23 different subjects across a wide range of medical conditions. Summaries of the completed studies on these subjects are published in the Board's Annual Reports. The Board also advises on individual cases referred by the Benefits Agency Medical Advisers, who are officers of the Secretary of State. In addition, it carries out other work as directed, including the recent analysis of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance cases as part of the Department's report "A Study of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance Awards" which was published on 12 March.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate she has made of the number of asylum seekers claiming income support benefit in the years *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96, *(d)* 1996–97 and 1997–98; [37969]

(2) what estimate she has made of the sums paid in income support benefit to asylum seekers in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95, *(d)* 1995–96, *(e)* 1996–97 and *(f)* 1997–98. [37970]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Asylum seekers—average annual income support caseloads and estimated annual expenditure

Year	*Average annual income support asylum seekers caseload*	*Estimated annual income support asylum seekers expenditure (£ million)*
1992–93	36,000	98
1993–94	40,000	112
1994–95	42,000	123
1995–96	48,000	140
1996–97	51,000	154
1997–98	50,000	157

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Estimated annual expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest million pounds.
3. Sample size 5 per cent.
4. Figures from February 1997 onwards will include a number of non-asylum seekers who receive Urgent Case Payments for other reasons.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, February 1993 to May 1997.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the *(a)* location of, *(b)* administrative costs of, *(c)* salary costs of and *(d)* number of staff employed at the headquarters of (i) the

Benefits Agency, (ii) the War Pensions Agency, (iii) the IT Services Agency, (iv) the Contributions Agency and (v) the CSA. [36370]

Mr. Field *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* The information is set out in the table.

Agency	Location	Administrative costs (£)	Salary costs (£)	Number of staff
BA	Leeds	4,781,200	12,291,300	637
WPA	Blackpool	124,087	903,768	48
ITSA	North West	1,874,145	2,186,411	88
	North East	149,080	242,000	7
	St. Albans	127,783	203,690	6
CA	Newcastle	502,000	3,324,000	138
CSA	Newcastle	155,894	2,225,620	98
	Birkenhead	14,568	209,188	9
	Northampton	21,340	307,851	13
	Dudley	28,665	447,928	13
	Hastings	9,540	143,890	5

Notes:

1. Figures given are estimated costs for the financial year ending 31 March 1998.
2. Each Headquarters organisation is set up to meet the business needs of the Agency. The functions included in the definition of Headquarters varies between the Agencies and as a result the above information is not directly comparable.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost of increasing the earning disregard for housing benefit by £5 per child for families with children. [37241]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The estimated cost of increasing the earnings disregard by £5 per child for families with children is £80 million[1] in a full year.

[1]Figure rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to link the housing benefit system to *(a)* the family credit system and *(b)* a tax credit scheme. [37227]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have no plans to link the Housing Benefit system to the Family Credit system. Issues to do with tax credit schemes, such as the Working Families Tax Credit, are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost of increasing the earning disregard threshold for housing benefit *(a)* from £5 to £10 for single people, and by £10 for other claimants and *(b)* from £5 to £20 for single people and by £20 for other claimants. [37242]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated cost of increasing the earning disregard

£ million

Earnings disregard change	Cost (full year)
(a) increase by £5 for singles, £10 others	110
(b) increase by £15 for singles, £20 others	250

Note:
Costs rounded to nearest £10 million.

Income Support

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the number of households with incomes within the income support thresholds, not in receipt of income support, broken down by tenure. [37213]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated number of households not claiming income support to which they are entitled

Tenure type	Estimated number of households
LA tenants	460,000
Private tenants	290,000
Owner occupiers	740,000
Total	1,490,000

Notes:

1. In the analysis presented here, a household is included if at least one benefit unit within the household is entitled to but not receiving Income Support.
2. Rounded to the nearest 10,000

Source:
Family Resources Survey 1995/96.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the review being undertaken by officials concerning the treatment of income from personal loan repayment protection insurance cover for those claiming jobseeker's allowance will be completed; and if she will make a statement. [37824]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Officials have completed their review and, as announced in the Green Paper "New Ambition For Our Country—A New Contract for Welfare", we will be laying regulations, subject to statutory consultation, to introduce a disregard of these payments, provided they are used for their intended purpose. Draft regulations have been sent to the Social Security Advisory Committee and Local Government Associations for consultation.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the practice of treating payments from personal loan repayment protection insurance policies as income for the purposes of calculating jobseeker's allowance payments commenced; what treatment will be given to any lump sum payments made by lenders and insurers to individuals whose jobseeker's allowance has been reduced with regard to benefits disregards and personal taxation; and if she will make a statement. [37825]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The regulations under which payments from personal loan repayment protection policies are treated as income for the purpose of calculating income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) unless paid direct to the creditor, have been in place since JSA was introduced in October 1996. These rules were based on equivalent rules which have applied to other income-related benefits for many years.

Representatives of the insurance and banking industries held discussions with officials in this Department to ensure that any additional payments made to individuals

whose benefit had been affected by these insurance payments would be made in such a way that they would not affect benefit entitlement.

Personal taxation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Disability Appeal Tribunal

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases are awaiting hearing before the Disability Appeal Tribunal; and what is the average time between an appeal to a disability tribunal being received and the hearing date. [38075]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The operation of the appeals system is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) who report that in July 1997 there was an overall total of 29,566 outstanding appeals to Disability Appeal Tribunals and an overall average clearance time of 30 weeks.

We are determined to reduce the current delays and complexity in the appeals system. The Social Security Bill, which paves the way for modernising the delivery of Social Security, including the handling of appeals, is currently being debated in Committee in the House of Lords. The Secretary of State will assume responsibility for the administration of the appeals system. She will set and publish demanding targets for the administration of appeals and report on the results.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 7 April 1998

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Stolen Art Treasures

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the procedures used by national museums and galleries in relation to stolen art treasures; and if he will review those procedures. [37279]

Mr. Fisher: The national museums and galleries take the greatest care to ensure that objects being acquired for their collections have not been stolen. I have no reason to believe that their procedures need to be reviewed. However, if the hon. Member has evidence to the contrary, I would be grateful if he would write to me about this.

Creative Industries

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the total annual contribution of cultural activities to gross domestic product in each of the last three years. [37129]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 31 March 1998]:* The current total revenues of the UK creative industries are estimated at over £55 billion. There are no reliable historic data on the contribution of the creative industries to gross domestic product. In 1995, the last year for which such information is available, the contribution net of inputs ("valued added") was around £25 billion, approaching 4 per cent. of gross domestic product.

National Lottery

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list those organisations responsible for awarding National Lottery grants, indicating the categories of grant they cover and their contact telephone numbers and addresses. [37253]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 established five areas to benefit equally from the Lottery: sports, the arts, heritage, charities and projects to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium. The responsibility for distributing these proceeds rests with a number of independent distributing bodies. These are the four national Arts Councils, the four national Sports Councils, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the National Lottery Charities Board and the Millennium Commission.

The Arts Councils aim to help people across the UK enjoy, and take part in, the broadest possible range of arts activities. Arts Lottery money is being spent on a wide range of capital projects, including the renovation and re-equipping of arts venues. The Arts Councils also fund revenue projects designed to enable more people to participate and take part in arts activities and to encourage more new plays, music and other work. The addresses of the Arts Councils are:

The Arts Council of England
14 Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 3NQ
Tel: 0171 312 0123

The Arts Council of Wales
9 Museum Place
Cardiff
CF1 3NX
Tel: 01222–388288

The Scottish Arts Council
12 Manor Place
Edinburgh
EH3 7DD
Tel: 0131–226–6051

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland
MacNeice House
77 Malone Road
Belfast
BT9 6AQ
Tel: 01232–667000.

The Sports Councils fund capital sports projects for all designated sports. They also fund revenue programmes under the themes of coaching and leadership, talent identification and development. The addresses are:

The English Sports Council
16 Upper Woburn Place
London
WC1H 0QP
Tel: 0345–649–649

The Scottish Sports Council
Caledonian House
South Gyle
Edinburgh
EH12 9DQ
Tel: 0131–339–9000

The Sports Council for Wales
Sophia Gardens
Cardiff
CF1 9SW
Tel: 01222–300500

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland
House of Sport
Upper Malone Road
Belfast
BT9 5LA
Tel: 01232–382222.

The aim of the National Heritage Memorial Fund's Heritage Lottery Fund is to preserve, restore or acquire the nation's most treasured heritage which makes up the fabric of the Britain's history and culture. The Fund is

able to award funds to organisations and volunteers who care for the countryside, buildings, museums, industrial heritage, archives and parks. The address is:

The Heritage Lottery Fund

7 Holbein Place

London

SW1W 8NR

Tel: 0171–591–6000.

The National Lottery Charities Board distributes grants to help those at the greatest disadvantage in society and to improve the quality of life in the community. The Board distributes Lottery funds to both registered charities and organisations with a philanthropic aim and allocates funding on a themed basis. The initial rounds have been based on themes of poverty, youth issues and low income; health, disability and care; improving people's living environment; and voluntary sector development. The address is:

The National Lottery Charities Board

St. Vincent House

16 Suffolk Street

London

SW1Y 4NL

Tel: 0171–747–5300.

The Millennium Commission supports projects to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium. Millennium Commission awards fall into three categories: capital projects, the Millennium Awards scheme to assist individuals who help in the community and the Millennium Exhibition and festival. The Commission are supporting a nationwide programme of events which will take place throughout 2000. The aim is to bring communities together, while reflecting religious, ethnic and cultural groups. The address is:

The Millennium Commission

Portland House

Stag Place

London

SW1E 5EZ

Tel: 0171–880–2001.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he plans to publish draft statutory directions to the National Lottery distributing bodies. [38115]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* I intend to publish to day drafts of the revised Policy Directions for the Arts Council of England, the English Sports Council, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the National Lottery Charities Board. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland plan to publish drafts of revised Policy Directions for the Arts and Sports Councils of those countries at the same time. Drafts of revised Financial Directions for all existing Lottery distributors will be published in the early summer. I will publish drafts of Directions to the New Opportunities Fund for consultation with its board after Royal Assent to the National Lottery Bill but hope to make available a preliminary draft soon.

Sport (UK Presidency)

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action he has taken on sport during the United Kingdom Presidency. [38432]

Mr. Banks: I arranged a meeting with my counterparts from Luxembourg and Austria last Thursday. This was the first opportunity that I and my European colleagues have had to discuss the important contribution that sport can make to social and economic development within Europe.

We agreed that the first ever Green paper on sport in the European Union should aim in particular to:

- identify a better model of coordination between all the agencies involved so that more resources are released and existing resources used more effectively;
- encourage and develop imaginative and practicable sports schemes aimed specifically at achieving measurable results against social exclusion;
- consider scope for using Eurathlon to support projects aimed at reducing social exclusion, as part of its review of the Eurathlon Programme;
- focus on youth unemployment and the ways of creating secure jobs in the sport sector, by stepping up the exchange of experience at national and local level; and examine the way European law is impacting on the day to day business of sports governing bodies.

These proposals are a further example of the progress being made during the UK Presidency of the European Union.

I am delighted that my Austrian colleague Dr. Peter Wittman has expressed his firm intention to pursue these issues during his country's Presidency in the second half of 1998. The European Commission is expected to publish its Green paper on sport around the turn of the year.

PRIME MINISTER

Competition Bill

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what factors he will take into account in reaching a decision on whether to seek to *(a)* reject and *(b)* amend those amendments to the Competition Bill [*Lords*] made in the House of Lords with regard to competition policy and media shareholdings. [37048]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The new clause added to the Bill in the House of Lords is unnecessary because the Competition Bill already contains a prohibition of abuse of dominance which will apply across the economy and newspapers will not be exempt.

Israel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister which representatives of the British Government will be present at the celebrations to mark the 50th Anniversary of Israel. [37962]

The Prime Minister: The Government are participating in a range of activities in Britain to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. We have not yet confirmed who will represent the Government at celebrations in Israel.

Anthrax

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what communication Her Majesty's Government have had from the Government and Government agencies of Israel about information received by the Home Office about the threat of anthrax in the UK received on 5 March. [37328]

The Prime Minister: It is not the Government's policy to disclose the nature of discussions with other countries on intelligence matters.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the other members of the UN who have received threats pertaining to the spread of anthrax by Iraq. [37329]

The Prime Minister: It would be a matter for the countries concerned whether to disclose information of this kind.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on discussions between Scotland Yard and the CIA, FBI and agencies of the Department of Defense in Washington about the threat of the infiltration of anthrax spores into the United Kingdom. [37330]

The Prime Minister: The Metropolitan Police regularly discuss matters of shared interest with their counterparts in the United States, including the threat from weapons of mass destruction where appropriate.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Vehicle Registration Year Identifier System

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce the arrangements for the introduction of the revised vehicle registration year identifier system, and the format of the succeeding systems; and if he will make a statement. [37286]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We hope to make an announcement soon.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the Eurostar traffic forecasts submitted to him by those organisations bidding to *(a)* construct the Channel Tunnel rail link and *(b)* run the Eurostar franchise. [37781]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No. These forecasts comprise information which is commercially confidential to the companies concerned.

Recycling

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many *(a)* local authority collection schemes, *(b)* collection banks and *(c)* sorting and baling facilities are available in England and Wales for the recycling of plastic bottles; and how many properties have household or kerbside collection of plastic bottles; [37729]

(2) how many collection sites there are in England and Wales for the recycling of plastic vending cups; [37730]

(3) how many banks there are in England and Wales for the collection of *(a)* glass bottles and *(b)* paper. [37728]

Angela Eagle: The provision of bring sites and separate collection for any recyclables is for each Waste Collection Authority to determine within the resources they have available. The latest available figures are from the 1995–96 Municipal Waste Management Survey, published in December 1997. These show that:

Glass: there were 11,424 bring sites provided by local authorities and in addition 570 civic amenity sites also accepted glass for recycling; 265,647 tonnes of glass were collected for recycling from these sources.

Paper: there were 6,344 bring sites provided by local authorities and in addition 410 civic amenity sites also accepted paper for recycling; 289,857 tonnes of paper were collected for recycling from these sources.

Plastics: there were 1,058 bring sites provided by local authorities and in addition 127 civic amenity sites also accepted plastic for recycling; 2,457 tonnes of plastic were collected for recycling from these sources. No figures are available that show the number of separate household or kerbside collection schemes which collect plastics. In total in 1995–96, bring sites, civic amenity sites and separate collection schemes yielded 3,500 tonnes of plastics for recycling.

No figures are centrally available on the number of sorting and baling facilities available for plastics. No central data of how many collection sites there are for the recycling of plastic vending cups are held.

Agencies (Relocation)

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many Government agencies have relocated from London to the regions in the last 10 years. [38295]

Angela Eagle: In the last 10 years, the Marine Emergencies Organisation and the Surveyors General Organisation which together now form the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, were relocated from London to Southampton, and the Driving Standards Agency was relocated from London to Nottingham. A further four of the Department's Next Steps agencies have headquarters outside London.

Civil Servants (RDAs)

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if civil servants transferred to the regional development agencies will retain their Civil Service status. [38303]

Mr. Caborn: In keeping with the majority of executive Non Departmental Public Bodies, Regional Development Agencies will not be Crown Bodies, and their staff will therefore not be Civil Servants.

Nottinghamshire County Council (Structure Plan)

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the present Nottinghamshire County Council Structure Plan was agreed by the Secretary of State; and what is the earliest date it could be reviewed. [38233]

Mr. Caborn: Following legislative changes introduced in 1991 the Secretary of State is no longer responsible for agreeing local authority development plans, other than

in very exceptional circumstances. The current Nottinghamshire Structure Plan Review was adopted by Nottinghamshire County Council in November 1996.

Since the reorganisation of Nottingham City as a unitary authority on 1 April, any review of the plan and its timing is the joint responsibility of Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council.

Road Charging

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to undertake trials of the viability of an urban system of road user charging as a means of reducing urban congestion. [37861]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Small scale trials involving volunteers are in progress in Leicester and Bristol. These are assessing behavioural responses to road user charging. Whether the Government consider commissioning further work will depend on the proposals for dealing with urban congestion that they set out in the forthcoming integrated transport White Paper. New primary legislation would be needed to enable trial or pilot schemes in which drivers were compelled to pay road user charges.

Local Government Staff Commission

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Local Government Staff Commission for England will be wound up. [38435]

Ms Armstrong: The Local Government Staff Commission for England has completed its duties resulting from the 1992 Structural Review. Yesterday we laid before the House an Order winding up the Commission on 12 May. I am very grateful to the Commission for all the work it has done to safeguard the interests of local authority staff during the Structural Review.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his capping principles for 1998–99 and the list of authorities which he intends to designate; and if he will make a statement. [38517]

Mr. Prescott: Derbyshire County Council is the only authority (out of 433) for which I am proposing a cap limit, which would require it to reduce its budget requirement. Other authorities have set budgets and council taxes within the provisional limits which I set.

I have proposed a cap for the Council which I consider, on the basis of all the information available so far, to be reasonable, appropriate and achievable in all the circumstances of the authority.

The capping principles for 1998/99 are set out in the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts 1998/99 (2 February 1998). They are subject to a general proviso that no authority is to be designated if its budget requirement is no more than £15,000 above the limit implied by these principles. I have placed copies of this document in the Library of the House. The main points are:

(i) The City of London, Inner London boroughs, and Shire Districts are able to increase their budget requirements by 1.5 per cent. or the increase in their SSAs for all non-police services, whichever is the greater;

(ii) Outer London Boroughs, Metropolitan Districts, Unitary authorities and the Isles of Scilly and Shire Counties are able to increase their budget requirements by 3 per cent. or the increase in their SSAs for all non-police services, whichever is the greater;

(iii) Fire and Civil Defence Authorities are able to increase their budget requirements by 4.5 per cent.;

(iv) Police Authorities are able to increase their budgets by 3.2 per cent.

Authorities budgeting more than 12.5 per cent. above SSA are subject to a cash freeze.

In accordance with section 54 and 56 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, I have therefore decided to designate Derbyshire County Council. The amount that I am proposing should be the maximum amount calculated by that authority as its budget requirement for 1998/99 is £468.757 million.

This decision demonstrates that we are taking our commitments on spending very seriously. The authority now has 28 days, starting today, in which to inform us whether or not it accepts its proposed cap. If it accepts, the cap will be confirmed by notice and the authority can set a revised lower budget. The budget we are proposing means £3.9 million reduced expenditure for Derbyshire so Band D council tax bills will be cut by around £17 million.

If the authority challenges, it must propose an alternative amount together with its reasons for doing so and will have the opportunity to meet with Ministers to explain its case.

Once we have considered all the available information we shall propose a final cap which will be included in an Order, a draft of which will be debated by the House of Commons. If the draft Order is approved, a final cap is set by notice and a revised budget and council tax must then be set by the authority.

Electricity Industry (Swanwick)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will assess the advantages of selling to the National Grid excess power generated at the New En Route Centre at Swanwick. [38391]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No. The New En Route Centre does not normally generate electricity, and relies on power supplied via the National Grid. It does have two standby generators, but for safety reasons these would be used only when the main power supply failed.

Greater London Authority

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what provision has been made for expenditure in 1998–99 on preparing for the Greater London Authority; and when these resources will be spent. [38319]

Mr. Raynsford: The Main Estimates published today include provision on Class VI, Vote 4 (Local Government and regional policy, England) of £2 million in 1998/99 for preparing for the Greater London Authority. This sum reflects the best forecast that can be made at this stage of the total costs in 1998/99 as a whole. No expenditure can be incurred before the Main Estimates are approved in July. No spending will take place unless Londoners vote in favour of the proposals for a Greater London Authority in the Referendum on May 7. There will be no significant expenditure on preparing for the Greater London Authority until Parliament has approved the principle of the legislation providing for the new authority's establishment.

Spending Plans

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the spending plans of the *(a)* Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *(b)* Ordnance Survey, *(c)* Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, *(d)* Office of the Rail Regulator and *(e)* Office of Water Services for 1998–99. [38518]

Mr. Prescott: Today I published the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Annual Report for 1998. It sets out in detail the outcome of the July 1997 and March 1998 Budget Statements, as it affects my areas of responsibility. The Report provides an overview of how my Department, Ordnance Survey, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, the Office of the Rail Regulator and the Office of Water Services have discharged their functions over the past year. It provides a background to each spending programme and sets out our achievements to date with plans for the future for securing integration between the policies and services and functions of the two former departments.

TREASURY

National Insurance

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons the forward cost of raising employee's national insurance contributions threshold to £81 per week is not included in the Financial Statement and Budget report. [36082]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 24 March 1998]:* As the Chancellor made clear in his Budget Statement on 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1097–112, raising the employee's national insurance contributions threshold to £81 is a measure which he intends to bring forward in the future. As such, it would not have been appropriate to include this measure in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Road Fuel Duty

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the effective annual increase in road fuel duty following the July 1997 and March 1998 increases. [36357]

Dawn Primarolo: Following the March 1998 Budget, road fuel duty rates are 8.8 per cent. higher in real terms than the (volume weighted) average of the rates in 1997–98.

The above increase is additional to the increase in RPI, currently 3.2 per cent. per year.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on expenditure in the United Kingdom under European Communities budget line A-3501, Preparatory and Support Operations for the Achievement of Economic and Monetary Union. [36962]

Mrs. Liddell: Expenditure under this EC Budget line, which amounts to about £720,000 in 1998, is the Commission's own administrative expenditure. It does not involve expenditure in the United Kingdom. It covers support and evaluation studies and activities across the European Union relating to the implementation of economic and monetary union.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the long-term effect of Economic and Monetary Union on the fiscal independence of Government policy for acceding states. [37567]

Mrs. Liddell: Fiscal policy will remain the responsibility of the Member States that participate in stage 3 of EMU, subject to the constraints of the Stability and Growth Pact.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the findings of the European Monetary Institute on the suitability of member states for inclusion in European economic and monetary union, in respect of future enlargement of the Union. [36547]

Mrs. Liddell: The convergence report of the European Monetary Institute was published on 25 March. The Government are now considering this report alongside the convergence report produced by the European Commission, and the European Commission's recommendation on which countries should proceed to stage 3 of Economic and Monetary Union. Once we have considered its findings we will report to Parliament in line with the usual scrutiny procedures.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future meetings to be held during the UK presidency of the EU concerning European Monetary Union. [36564]

Mrs. Liddell: Throughout the UK Presidency of the EU, the Ecofin Council will meet to consider preparations for Stage Three of EMU.

The key decisions on which Member States will join the single currency will be taken over the first weekend in May. The Commission and EMI convergence reports and the Commission's recommendation will form the basis for these decisions.

On 1 May Ecofin will assess which Member States fulfil the necessary conditions for the adoption of a single currency and will recommend its findings to Heads of State and Government (Article 109j(2) of the Treaty). On 2 May, Heads of State and Government will confirm, on the basis of the Ecofin recommendation, which Member States shall proceed to stage three of EMU.

Mortgage Sales

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take to review the effectiveness of the regulation of the sale of mortgages through the code of the Council of Mortgage Lenders. [36765]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have been considering how best we can carry forward our manifesto commitment for fair dealing in mortgages, the most significant transaction many ordinary people undertake.

As part of a series of decisions on the future scope of regulatory reform, I am announcing today that the proposed legislation to establish the Financial Services Authority (FSA) as a single regulator will include powers enabling it to regulate mortgage business. We will be monitoring the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) Mortgage Code which was introduced in July 1997, to see if that, on its own, is capable of protecting mortgage borrowers to the standard the Government are determined to see achieved.

The Treasury will be discussing the arrangements with the CML, but the main elements are likely to consist of:

i. a baseline (verified by the Office of Fair Trading) against which to monitor the Code;

ii. regular information and reports from CML;

iii. independent information from other sources;

iv. an on-going consultation process with CML itself about how the Code is working; and

v. a formal review in 1999, then, if the Government decide not to legislate, an interim review in the year 2000, with reviews every two years after that—ie in 2002, 2004, and so on.

The Government will be monitoring the Code's impact on the whole mortgage package, ie the mortgage itself, the tying-in products such as insurances, as well as repayment vehicles like endowments, even though the latter are already regulated by the FSA.

Whether the reserve power is activated will depend upon a number of factors, including the extent to which the Code secures good quality advice for prospective borrowers; promotes good practice in lenders' dealings with borrowers in difficulty; and provides remedies for borrowers' legitimate grievances. The Treasury will ask the CML to report on the impact of the Code, and provide statistical background, before the legislation is brought into effect. The Treasury will also look to the Department of Trade and Industry and the Office of Fair Trading to monitor the guidelines for non-status market lenders and brokers, and agreements under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. In addition, the Treasury will look to the FSA for an assessment of the likely costs of activating the reserve power, to assess whether they would be commensurate with any potential benefits. Others with knowledge of the mortgage market would also be consulted before any decision is made.

Fuel Tax (Rural Motorists)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the increase in fuel tax on motorists in rural areas. [37073]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government recognise that many people, especially in the more isolated rural areas, have become increasingly dependent on car ownership. But all motorists must also make a contribution in tackling global warming caused by greenhouse gases. To help provide alternatives to the car, the Government are spending an extra £50 million a year on rural transport. They are also spending an additional £40 million to increase the rebate paid to bus operators.

Euro

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from what sources metals for the single currency coinage will be acquired; and what environmental impact assessment has been undertaken in respect of that acquisition. [37789]

Mrs. Liddell: The principal metals planned to be used for the euro coinage are steel and copper. As these metals are in plentiful supply, no significant environmental impact is expect to arise from the demand forecast to be generated by the euro coinage.

Electronic Cash

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the creation of electronic cash, and on the criteria for bodies to be allowed to operate electronic cash systems. [37765]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Government see electronic cash having enormous potential in a wide range of areas. But as that potential is still underdeveloped and the technologies involved are undergoing continuous change, it would be premature to lay down criteria now for the sorts of bodies who are likely to participate in this market.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Inland Revenue's definition of millennium conversion expenditure, with particular reference to whether the definition includes the development of new systems. [37581]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Inland Revenue's expenditure on its Year 2000 project covers all capital, manpower (management and technical) and running costs necessary to review, convert and test the computer systems which support its business.

Since the start of the Year 2000 project all new systems are being developed to be fully millennium compliant and their costs are not included in the Year 2000 project costs.

All the Department's expenditure on Year 2000 conversion, including the Year 2000 project and work to deal with embedded technology, is being met from within existing funding limits.

Pensioner Taxpayers

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of taxpayers who are pensioners. [38067]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* It is estimated that in 1998–99 there are 3.3 million individuals aged 65 and over who pay income tax.

Lloyd's of London

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the United States' authorities regarding litigation in the United States of America relating to Lloyd's of London. [38180]

Mrs. Liddell: None. However, my officials have regular contacts with state insurance commissioners in the United States to discuss a range of issues relating to Lloyd's. An official from the British Embassy in Washington has also met in the last year with the Securities and Exchange Commission to discuss matters relating to Lloyd's.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances papers held by his Department in relation to Lloyd's could be released to a grand jury in the United States of America investigating the affairs of Lloyd's of London. [38181]

Mrs. Liddell: The disclosure of confidential information provided for regulatory purposes is restricted by European and domestic legislation. Whether or not disclosure would be permitted would depend on the specific circumstances of the case. However, disclosure to a Grand Jury in the United States would not generally be permitted without the consent of the person from whom the information was obtained, and where different, any person to whom it relates.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Securities Exchange Commission in the United States of America regarding Lloyd's of London since 1 May 1997. [38179]

Mrs. Liddell: None.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future scope of regulation by the Financial Services Authority. [38430]

Mrs. Liddell: As has already been announced, we propose to publish for consultation this Summer draft legislation to reform the structure of financial services regulation. This will bring together regulation of investment business, deposit-taking and insurance business under a single regulator, the Financial Services Authority. The legislation presents an opportunity to ensure that the Financial Services Authority has the powers it needs to regulate effectively, and to provide for the scope of statutory regulation to be extended to new activities in the event that self-regulatory mechanisms fail to deliver the standards that the Government and consumers expect.

The Government have been considering how best we can carry forward the Government's manifesto commitment for fair dealing in mortgages, the most significant transaction many people undertake.

I have decided that the proposed legislation to establish the Financial Services Authority as a single regulator will include powers for the Treasury to extend the scope of activities regulated by the Financial Services Authority. The activities that could if necessary be regulated will include mortgage business. The case for regulating mortgage business will be regularly reviewed by Ministers. The first review will take place before the Bill comes into force.

In the meantime the Treasury will monitor the Code introduced by the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) in July 1997 to see whether it can deliver the Government's objectives without statutory intervention. The Council of Mortgage Lenders is currently bringing intermediaries within the Code's scope, and introducing appeals arrangements. It is too soon to decide whether the Code, on its own, is capable of protecting mortgage borrowers to the standard that the Government are determined to see achieved.

Whether statutory mortgage regulation is introduced will depend upon a number of factors, including the extent to which the Code secures good quality advice for prospective borrowers and provides remedies for borrowers' legitimate grievances. The Treasury will ask the Council of Mortgage Lenders to report on the impact of the Code, and provide statistical background. The Treasury will also look to the Department of Trade and Industry and the Office of Fair Trading to monitor the impact of recent changes in the guidelines for non-status market lenders and brokers, and the upper limit to which these consumer credit agreements apply from £15,000 to £25,000. In addition, the Treasury will look to the Financial Services Authority for an assessment of the likely costs of activating the reserve power, to assess whether they would be commensurate with any potential benefits. Others with knowledge of the mortgage market would also be consulted before any decision is made.

The draft Bill will also make it possible to extend statutory regulation to include the conduct of retail banking and non-life insurance business. We have no plans at present to extend the scope of regulation in these areas, but standards of conduct and the risks faced by consumers will be kept under review. Regulation would be extended only after consultation, including an appraisal of the costs and benefits.

The Government have also decided to consult on the future of the Insurance Brokers Registration Council. A consultation paper has been published today by the Treasury. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Financial Services Authority's rule-making powers. [38431]

Mrs. Liddell: We intend that the draft legislation will give the Financial Services Authority wide enabling powers to make rules. The rules will have the force of law, and be capable of imposing binding obligations upon firms. The rule-making power will enable the Financial Services Authority to lay down requirements anywhere along the spectrum from broad principles to detailed requirements.

The Financial Services Authority will also be able to issue guidance on the interpretation of its rules and other regulatory matters.

The rule-making power will be exercisable for the purpose of protecting the interests of customers of financial services businesses. Consistent with the need for differentiated levels of regulation for wholesale and retail

business, the Financial Services Authority will be required to ensure that its rules take account of the fact that rules appropriate to business conducted with some classes of investor may be inappropriate in the case of others.

We also intend that the Financial Services Authority will be able to impose financial resources rules, supplemented by additional requirements on individual entities by means of administrative notifications.

The Financial Services Authority will be able to grant waivers, to disapply its rules on a case by case basis (subject to tests similar to those in the Financial Services Act 1986). The Financial Services Authority will be under an obligation to publish waivers, subject to considerations of commercial or regulatory confidentiality.

We intend that a right of action for damages for private persons will attach to the Financial Services Authority's rules, except financial resources rules and others specified by the Financial Services Authority. The draft legislation will create a presumption that the rules confer no right of action for damages on non-private persons, unless the Financial Services Authority were to stipulate otherwise.

We intend that the power to make rules will be reserved to the Board of the Financial Services Authority. The Financial Services Authority will be obliged to consult on any proposed rules unless the delay created would be prejudicial to the interests of existing and potential investors, policyholder or depositors. The Financial Services Authority will be obliged to publish cost benefit appraisals of its proposals and other options as part of the consultation exercise unless the Financial Services Authority reasonably believes that the proposals on which it is consulting will reduce the costs of compliance incurred by those to whom the proposals will apply or are neutral in terms of such costs or that any increase in compliance costs will be of marginal significance only. More generally, we intend that exercise of the Financial Services Authority's rule-making powers will be informed by its statutory objectives.

The Financial Services Authority has today published a consultation document with initial proposals concerning the exercise of these powers. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Benchmarking Project

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the public sector benchmarking project. [38515]

Dr. David Clark: I am launching today a new phase of the Public Sector Benchmarking Project, designed to help public bodies share best practice more systematically with each other, with the private sector and, ultimately, with the most successful government bodies in other countries. This project uses the widely recognised European Business Excellence Model. Self-assessment against the Model promotes continuous improvement and customer focus, and facilitates benchmarking with the wide variety of other organisations using the Model.

I have placed copies of the evaluation report on the first two years of the project in the Libraries of the House and it is also available on the Cabinet Office Internet site, at www.gtnet.gov.uk/co/cohome.htm. It is clear from the report that participation has brought great benefit to the 100 organisations involved in the project so far, and has enabled comparison particularly with the private sector in a way which was previously impossible. Six organisations involved have already achieved a score of over 450 points against the Model, which is comparable to those achieved by winners of the several regional quality awards. 60 organisations have already expressed interest in participation in this new phase, even before details could be circulated.

The project has so far primarily targeted Next Steps executive agencies and the larger non-departmental public bodies. Experience with a range of other public bodies has demonstrated that the Model can be of equal value in other sectors. The new phase is therefore open to any organisation in the wider public sector, and my officials will be working closely with other departments and representative bodies to encourage uptake of the project, for example among police forces, local government, and the health and education services. We will develop and emphasise the clear links between the Business Excellence Model and agencies' ministerial targets; with other quality schemes used in the public sector, particularly Charter Mark, Investors in People and ISO 9000; and with the White Papers and guidance recently or shortly to be published on Better Government, Best Value, market testing and contracting out in central government, Opening Up Quangos, The New NHS, and Excellence in Schools.

There has been considerable international interest in the project. I am keen to promote this and build on the work already done, so that we can share best practices between national public sectors. My officials will work with their counterparts abroad and in the European Commission to facilitate international comparisons, and with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in its setting up of an International Benchmarking Network for the public sector.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Oil and Gas Industry

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantity of alkylphenolic substances was discharged by the offshore oil and gas industry in each of the last five years; and what assessment he has made of the reliability of the figures. [32387]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 5 March 1998]:* Data on discharges of alkylphenolic substances for the years 1993 and 1997. Discharges for those years are as follows:

Year	*Tonnes*
1993	34.35
1994	32.18
1995	25.20
1996	48.09
1997	54.36

The figures are supplied by the oil and gas industry to Government under the provisions of the Offshore Chemical Notification Scheme. Both industry and Government make every effort to improve the accuracy of the data supplied and it is possible that one reason for the apparent increase in recent years is as a result of these efforts. In addition, my offshore inspectors make spot checks of chemicals held and used offshore.

Calor Gas

Mrs. Organ: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) for what reasons the price of calor gas is not regulated; [33743]

(2) if she will seek to regulate the price of calor gas. [33744]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 12 March 1998]:* Given the level of competition in LPG supply generally, I see no need to regulate prices.

The Director General of Gas Supply regulates the supply of gas "through pipes". The supply of LPG in cylinders and tanks does not come within this definition.

The Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for keeping this industry, along with others not subject to specialist oversight, under review in order to detect monopolies and exploitation of market power.

OFT reviewed the price increases in LPG supply last Winter to see if they were an indication of such exploitation. It was concluded that they were not.

OFT is currently negotiating with the LPG supply industry, with DTI encouragement, with a view to establishing code of conduct covering charges for the removal of rented tanks. This would make switching by consumers easier.

Offshore Chemicals

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the application and implementation of the harmonised mandatory control system for the use and reduction of the discharge of offshore chemicals with particular reference to the operation of the CHARM model. [35903]

Mr. Battle: Over 500 products have been assessed by the UK under the provisions of the harmonised notification format, and of these more than 100 have been assessed using the CHARM model. The model promotes informed decisions on the use of offshore chemicals by quantifying the combined hazard and risk associated with their use and discharge. In collaboration with other contracting parties to the Oslo and Paris Convention, the UK has identified that some modifications will be required before full implementation of the CHARM model will be possible.

The trial period for the Harmonised Mandatory Control System will be reviewed in 1999 as agreed by the Oslo and Paris Commissions.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the tonnage of asbestos imported into the European Union from Canada in each of the last three years. [36147]

Mrs. Roche: Data on EU imports of asbestos from Canada are given in the table.

EU[1] imports of asbestos[2] from Canada

Year	*Tons*
1994	71,355
1995	71,744
1996	46,087
January-July 1997	13,617

[1] EU15 countries throughout.
[2] Code 278.4 of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) Revision 3.
Source:
Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade.

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what specific products containing chrysotile asbestos are *(a)* imported into the United Kingdom and *(b)* manufactured in the United Kingdom; what is the annual tonnage of asbestos incorporated in such products; and if she will make a statement. [36748]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* Some of the commodity codes used in official statistics do not distinguish products containing asbestos from those containing potential replacement materials. That is, they cannot be distinguished from potential substitute products.

Table 1 shows the position for those commodity codes where there is no ambiguity; all goods contain some chrysotile asbestos.

Table 1: Commodity codes for which all goods contain some chrysotile asbestos

Commodity code	*Description*	*Imported by UK in 1997?*	*Produced in UK in 1996?*
Fabricated asbestos fibres; asbestos mixtures articles of such mixtures or of asbestos, whether or not reinforced (Standard Industrial Trade Classification heading 663.81)			
6812 1000	Fabricated asbestos mixtures; mixtures with a basis of asbestos or with a basis of asbestos and magnesium carbonate	Yes	Yes
6812 3000	Cords and string, whether or not plaited	Yes	
6812 4000	Woven or knitted fabric	Yes	
6812 5000	Clothing, clothing accessories, footwear and headgear	Yes	
6812 2000	Yarn and thread	Yes	Yes
6812 6000	Paper, millboard and felt	Yes	Yes
6812 9010	Other, for use in civil aircraft	No	
6812 9090	Other	Yes	
6812 7000	Compressed asbestos fibre jointing, in sheets or rolls	Yes	Yes

Table 2 shows the position for commodity codes which can include both goods containing chrysolite asbestos and goods containing alternative materials.

Table 2: Commodity codes within which goods may contain some chrysotile asbestos

Tariff code	*Description*	*Imported by UK in 1997?*	*Produced in UK in 1996?*
Articles of asbestos cement, of cellulose fibre-cement or the like (Standard Industrial Trade Classification heading 661.83)			
6811 1000	Corrugated sheets	Yes	Yes
6811 2011	Sheets, not exceeding 40 x 60 cm, for roofing or walls	Yes	
6811 2080	Panels, tiles and similar articles	Yes	
6811 3000	Tubes, pipes and tube or pipe fittings	Yes	Yes
6811 9000	Other articles	Yes	Yes
Friction material and articles thereof, not mounted, for brakes etc. with basis of asbestos, cellulose or other mineral substances, whether or not combined with textile or other materials (Standard Industrial Trade Classification heading 663.82)			
6813 1010	Brake linings and pads, for use in civil aircraft	Yes	Yes
6813 1090	Other brake linings and pads	Yes	
6813 9010	Other, for use in civil aircraft	Yes	Yes
6813 9090	Other	Yes	

In some cases, the sales information on which the final column is based is collected only for combinations of products. Goods sold without being subjected to any manufacturing process have been excluded in deriving this column.

Information on the detailed composition of products imported or manufactured is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade from which countries chrysotile asbestos fibres imported into the United Kingdom originate and what was the total annual tonnage of chrysotile asbestos fibres imported into the United Kingdom from each country in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [36747]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* Chrysotile asbestos is not separately identified in the system under which United Kingdom trade is recorded. However, since 1986, trade in all other forms of asbestos has been prohibited. The figures in the table, therefore, relate to chrysotile asbestos.

UK imports of asbestos[1] 1993–97

Tonnes

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Austria	73	0	0	0	0
Belgium/Luxembourg	21	39	26	0	0
Brazil	0	23	0	0	0
Canada	8,348	8,767	8,519	6,134	3,915
Irish Republic	0	0	1	0	0
Slovakia	0	20	0	0	0
Germany	15	0	0	0	0
Japan	2	0	0	0	0
South Africa	360	450	553	602	496
Switzerland	0	0	1	1	0
USA	123	51	84	20	149
Zimbabwe	740	2,117	980	342	261
Totals	9,681	11,466	10,164	7,099	4,820

[1] Asbestos is defined as code 278.4 of the Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 3, (SITC Rev 3). This does not include asbestos cement and manufactures containing asbestos.

Source:
HM Customs and Excise

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which United Kingdom owned companies are engaged *(a)* in the mining of amphibole asbestos fibres and *(b)* in the manufacture of products containing such asbestos fibres; and if she will make a statement. [36740]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* I am not aware of any United Kingdom owned companies engaged in mining of amphibole asbestos fibres or engaged in the manufacture of products containing amphibole asbestos fibres.

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total annual tonnage of chrysotile asbestos fibres incorporated into products sold by United Kingdom companies in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [36739]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* Information on the detailed composition of products is not collected.

Trade Fairs

Mr. Swinney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list (i) the companies involved in and (ii) the locations of trade fairs or exhibitions *(a)* supported and *(b)* organised by her Department in 1996–97. [36189]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 26 March 1998]:* In 1996–97 there were 8,972 participants from UK firms and organisations at 342 trade fairs and exhibitions throughout the world under the terms of the Trade Fair Support Scheme (TFSS). Lists of participants and events have been deposited in the Library of the House. Details of which participants were subsidised are commercially confidential. The TFSS is open to all UK companies; Scottish Trade International, the Welsh Office and the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland offer support under different terms.

In addition at least 173 companies have benefited from DTI support under other schemes. Full information is available in the Library of the House.

Export Credit Guarantees

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list ECGD exposure in each of the last five years for *(a)* China, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Nigeria, *(d)* Saudi Arabia, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* South Africa, *(g)* India, *(h)* Iraq, *(i)* Philippines, *(j)* Vietnam, *(k)* Pakistan, *(l)* Qatar, *(m)* Iran and *(n)* Algeria; if she will list the value of defence business supported in each case; and if she will make a statement. [37010]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD is not in a position to provide such detailed figures for exposure for past years, because of disproportionate cost.

ECGD's current exposure in these markets is as follows:

£ million

	Current exposure	*Of which defence equipment*
China	2,621	0
Indonesia	1,773	654
Nigeria	1,657	0
Saudi Arabia	986	975
Turkey	742	255
South Africa	695	0
India	503	0
Iraq	625	0
Philippines	731	0
Vietnam	64	0
Pakistan	206	0
Qatar	704	402
Iran	120	1
Algeria	229	96

British Standards Institution

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations she has received relating to the role of the BSI; [37477]

(2) if she will undertake a full review of the functions and activities of the BSI; [37475]

(3) when *(a)* she and *(b)* her Ministers last met representatives of (i) the BSI and (ii) the standards certification industry apart from BSI. [37476]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* I have received a number of representations concerning the role of the BSI. These have been mainly from the standards certification industry. They have mostly been related to the proposed amendments to the BSI's constitution.

The Department does not intend to undertake a full review of the functions and activities of the BSI. BSI is independent of Government. The Department recently co-ordinated a cross Government consultation with regard to proposed amendments to the BSI constitution. I support the amended constitution that was overwhelmingly approved by BSI's members at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 27 February convened for the purpose.

I met representatives of BSI on 17 February. I have not met representatives from the standards certification industry apart from the BSI, but my officials are in regular contact.

Petrol Prices

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what statistics her Department collates relating to petrol prices throughout the United Kingdom; what analysis it makes of regional trends; and if she will publish this information. [38381]

Mr. Battle: National petrol, and diesel, price data are collected and published by my Department monthly in Energy Trends one month in arrears. Provisional estimates, for the previous month, are published earlier at the beginning of each month in the Advance Energy Statistics Press Notice. Longer runs of data and information relating to duty rates are published annually in the Digest of UK Energy Statistics. The very localised nature of petrol pricing means that meaningful regional analyses has to be based on very small regions. As such it is not cost effective for my Department to collect and publish such detailed information. My Department does, however, monitor the top level regional data produced by private sector organisations.

Leaded Fuels

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made towards setting a British standard for *(a)* additived lead replacement fuels and *(b)* over-the-counter additives for use when leaded fuels are phased out. [37990]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The British Standards Institution started working to develop a British Standard for lead replacement petrol in 1996. No British Standard is proposed for over-the-counter additives.

Motor Car Companies (Inward Investment)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the payments which have been made to foreign motor car companies to encourage inward investment in the last five years, the size and timing of such payments and the regions which have benefited. [37570]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The number of aid payments made by DTI to foreign owned UK motor car manufacturers in support of investment over the last 5 years was as follows:

Region	*Company*	*Payment of grant*[1]	*Ownership*
North West	Vauxhall	£1,000,000—August 1997	USA (GM)
West Midlands	Rover	£6,000,000—December 1997	Germany (BMW)
West Midlands	Jaguar	£5,500,000—March 1998	USA (Ford)
		£1,500,000—September 1997	
		£5,000,000—March 1997	
		£400,000—June 1995	
West Midlands	Peugeot	£400,000—September 1997	France
		£500,000—October 1996	

[1] Regional Selective Assistance (RSA)—applicable to UK assisted areas

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if, under the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, initiatives in one local authority area will be considered discriminatory against investors in that area if similar initiatives are not in place elsewhere. [37351]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* No. Policies towards investments, including local authorities' policies, may vary from area to area for legitimate reasons. Provided that a local authority's initiative does not disadvantage investors of one country compared with those of another in similar circumstances, it will not be considered discriminatory.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans she has to promote the target for the installation of solar roof and facade systems in the EU set out in the European Commission draft White Paper on Renewable Energy; and if she will make a statement; [37903]

(2) what plans she has to promote the adoption of the European Commission draft White Paper on Renewable Energy; and if she will make a statement; [37902]

(3) what plans she has to ensure that the renewable energy target for the EU set out in the European Commission draft White Paper on Renewable Energy is developed into achievable goals for each member country. [37904]

Mr. Battle: The Government have welcomed the European Commission's Renewable Energy White Paper. The UK Presidency is currently working towards a positive Council Resolution on the White Paper which can be agreed by all Member States. Although there are a number of reservations about the White paper, all Member States appear to recognise the need to prepare positive, practical and workable plans to provide a substantial increase in the use of renewables. I am optimistic that this will be reflected in a Council Resolution.

The UK is currently reviewing its renewables policy, examining what needs to be done to achieve the aim of 10% of the UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reduction commitments. The Review is considering all forms of new and renewable energy, including solar power. I am expecting officials shortly to present me with a number of options. I will make an announcement later this year. In the meantime my Department will continue with its assessment of different solar PV systems in a variety of buildings, under its New and Renewable Energy Programme. We are also supporting the Foresight SCOLAR programme, which aims to put a variety of PV arrays into 100 schools and colleges across the country.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the recent TUC forecast of the level of job losses in the manufacturing industry. [37700]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The TUC calculation is based on an assumed relationship between output growth and employment. The prospects for manufacturing and the precise relationship between output growth and employment will depend on a range of factors.

This Government are committed to providing an environment in which all businesses can prosper. We are pursuing policies to deliver a high and stable level of employment over the long term.

Energy Sources Review

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the cost of employing International Mining Consultants Ltd. to review energy sources. [37697]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The work being undertaken by International Mining Consultants is on the basis of a fixed price. That price is a commercial matter for the company.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons the review of energy sources was not conducted by the Energy Division of her Department. [37698]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The review is being carried out by a team within my Department's Energy Policy and Analysis Unit.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors underlay the delay in the appointment of consultants to review energy sources for power generation. [37699]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Consultants have been appointed to provide expert input on specific topics covered by the review. They were appointed when the particular matters had been identified on which independent expert advice was required.

Gas Pipes

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what formula is used by Transco to assess the need to replace gas pipes; and if she will make a statement. [37379]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Transco's pipeline replacement strategy is principally aimed at ensuring that their gas distribution system continues to operate safely, and meets the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive's Pipelines Safety Regulations 1996. I understand that Transco's methodology for replacing gas mains is based on a points system, building on principles developed by the Institution of Gas Engineers, and that this methodology is currently under review by Transco.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Watts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's response to the European Commission's proposals for the reform of the European structural funds. [36551]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *662–63*.

Mr. Healey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations her Department has made to the European Commission over reform of EU structural funds. [36537]

Mrs. Roche: I have met Commissioner Wulf-Mathies twice to discuss reform of the EU Structural Funds, on 8 January in London and 19 March in Brussels. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has met Mrs. Wulf-Mathies four times, on 13 October 1997 in Brussels, 8 January 1998 in London, 25 February in Brussels and most recently on 26 March in London. Officials are also in regular contact with the Commission. In all these meetings, we have pressed the Government's position that the Structural and Cohesion Funds should be affordable, durable and fair.

Mr. Paice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the European Commission's proposals to reform the European structural funds. [36535]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *662–63*.

Environmental Impact Assessment Directive

Mr. Sawford: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when regulations will be made to implement the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive as it applies to the offshore oil and gas industry. [38556]

Mr. Battle: I have today laid Regulations to implement the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EEC) as it applies to the offshore oil and gas industry. The Regulations will come into effect on 30 April 1998.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the pathogen strains that Iraq purchased from the United Kingdom between 1985 and 1989 had origins in the British biological weapons programme. [34847]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

I undertook on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 1445, to look into a number of points raised by the hon. and learned Member about the possible supply of UK origin anthrax spores to Iraq via the US, and will provide such information as is available in answer to this question in my reply.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Annual Results

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the significance of the Commissioners' 1997 annual results for the wider Church. [38519]

Mr. Stuart Bell: For the fourth successive year the total return on the Commissioners' investments has exceeded the independent benchmark. Provisional figures for 1997 show the total return on the Commissioners' assets was 19.7% against the WM All Funds benchmark of 16.5%. This reflects sound strategic and tactical investment choices as well as the current high market values of UK equities. The value of the assets at 31 December 1997 was £3,481 million (£2,976 million in 1996). Income was £135 million (£146 million in 1996) which represented an underlying increase after taking into account special dividends and other one-off items of £3.9 million in 1997 compared to £15.1 million in 1996. The Commissioners' total expenditure in 1997 in support of the Church was £130.6 million (136.2 million in 1996).

With the support and cooperation of the rest of the Church and, in particular, because of the generosity of the parishes, the Commissioners have been able to restore a balance between assets and distribution levels. They have also been able to rebalance their investment portfolio towards long term total return with a broader spread of risk. Both these factors have underpinned the strong investment performance of recent years.

A six year programme of reducing distribution levels was completed in 1997 and parishes now bear a greater responsibility for the financial support of their clergy. Parishes now meet 62% of the clergy pay bill (£160 million in 1997) with the Commissioners meeting only 15%. Parishes started to contribute towards clergy pensions from 1 January 1998 following the introduction of the new pensions arrangements made possible by the Pensions Measure which was passed by this House last year.

This continuing acceptance of responsibility and extra generosity from the parishes will enable the Commissioners to continue to fulfil their core responsibility of supporting the Church's ministry in poorer areas of the country for this and successive generations.

SCOTLAND

Surplus Property and Land

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the properties and land owned by his Department which he has identified as surplus to requirements, giving in each case their estimated value. [30326]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 23 February 1998]:* The list is set out in the table.

Department/Agency	*Property*	*Estimated value (£)*
Scottish Prisons Service	1.025 ha of land at Barlinnie	70,000
Scottish Prisons Service	0.6 ha of land at Noranside	20,000
Scottish Prisons Service	4.42 ha of land at Polmont	620,000
Scottish Office Home Department	0.77 ha of land at Clovenfords	60,000
Scottish Office Agriculture Environment and Fisheries Department	1.0 ha of land at Auchincruive	10,000
Scottish Office Agriculture Environment and Fisheries Department	2.44 ha of land at Stonehouse	400,000
Scottish Office Accommodation Division	56 High Street, Lossiemouth	25,000
Scottish Office Development Department	12.185 hectares of land at Rosyth	72,000

Department/Agency	Property	Estimated value (£)
Scottish Office National Roads Directorate	13 properties	179,639
Scottish Office National Roads Directorate	c400 areas of land at various locations[1]	[1]c1,700,000
Scottish Office Home Department	Disused Civil Defence bunker at Cultybraggan	17,500
Scottish Office Home Department	Former depot at Stirling	340,000

[1] As at 1 April 1997.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the estimated costs of the options for the temporary housing of the Scottish Parliament after it is elected in 1999. [34280]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 13 March 1998]:* In preparing assessments of options for interim accommodation for the Scottish Parliament, my officials made outline estimates of the comparative capital and running costs of solutions based on the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall on the Mound, Edinburgh; the Old Royal High School building, Edinburgh; and the former Glasgow High School complex at Charing Cross, Glasgow. These estimates included capital costs of necessary upgrading of the buildings and rent and rates over a two year period. The costs covered office accommodation required by the Parliament. For the Assembly Hall option, the office accommodation element was based on buildings currently occupied by the City of Edinburgh Council at George IV Bridge and Parliament Square. The respective estimated costs were as follows:

	£ million
Old Royal High School, Edinburgh	5
Assembly Hall	6
Charing Cross, Glasgow	3

The estimates did not include heating, lighting, security or other building-related services.

Public Bodies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish *(a)* the number of places on each of his Department's non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* the number of places that are currently unfilled on each non-departmental public body, *(c)* the total number of members that have resigned since 1 May 1997, *(d)* the total number that have retired since 1 May 1997, *(e)* the total number that have not had their contracts renewed since 1 May 1997, *(f)* the total number that have remained in place since 1 May 1997 and *(g)* the total number that have been appointed since 1 May 1997. [35279]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 19 March 1998]:* The information is set out in the table. The figures relate to Ministerial appointments only; a few appointments are made by others.

NDPD	Places	Places currently unfilled	Resignations since 1/5/97	Retirements since 1/5/97	Contracts not renewed since 1/5/97	Number remaining in place since 1/5/97	Number appointed since 1/5/97
Executive							
The Accounts Commission for Scotland	15	0	0	2	0	13	2
Scottish Agricultural and Biological Research Institutes:							
Hannah Research Institute	2	1	0	1	0	1	0
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute	15	1	0	1	0	14	0
Moredun Research Institute	3	0	0	0	0	3	0
Rowett Research Institute	3	0	0	0	0	3	0
Scottish Crop Research Institute	14	0	0	0	0	11	3
Crofters' Commission	8	1	1	0	0	7	0
Deer Commission for Scotland	13	0	0	0	0	13	0
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	6–12	0	0	4	0	8	4
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland	11	0	0	1	0	10	1
National Galleries of Scotland	12	0	0	0	0	9	3
National Library of Scotland	[1]—	—	—	—	—	—	—
National Museums of Scotland	15	1	0	0	0	14	0
Parole Board for Scotland	18	1	0	3	0	14	6
Royal Botanic Garden	9	0	0	0	0	9	0
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland	10	0	0	1	0	9	1
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	5	0	0	1	0	4	1
Scottish Arts Council	14	1	0	0	0	13	0
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration	8	0	0	0	0	8	0
Scottish Community Education Council	10	0	0	0	0	6	4
Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board	8	0	0	0	0	8	0
Scottish Council for Education Technology	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
Scottish Enterprise	8–12	0	1	0	0	9	2
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	12	2	2	0	0	10	0
Scottish Further Education Unit	7	1	1	1	0	3	3
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council	15	0	1	3	0	11	4
Scottish Homes	10	0	0	0	0	10	0
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust	10	1	0	0	0	8	1
Scottish Legal Aid Board	13	0	1	0	0	12	1
Scottish Medical Practices Committee	6	1	0	0	0	5	0
Scottish Natural Heritage	12	0	1	2	0	9	3

NDPD	Places	Places currently unfilled	Resignations since 1/5/97	Retirements since 1/5/97	Contracts not renewed since 1/5/97	Number remaining in place since 1/5/97	Number appointed since 1/5/97
Scottish Qualifications Authority	20	2	2	0	0	18	0
Scottish Screen	13	0	0	0	0	13	0
Scottish Sports Council	12	0	0	2	0	10	2
Scottish Tourist Board	7	1	0	2	0	5	1
Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council	8–12	0	0	0	0	11	1
Advisory							
Advisory Committee on Dental Establishments	11	0	0	0	0	9	2
Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People	[2]—	9	0	2	0	8	1
Advisory Committee on Sites of Special Scientific Interest	7	0	0	3	0	2	5
Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland	16	0	0	0	0	12	4
Building Standards Advisory Committee	14	0	0	0	0	14	0
Central Advisory Committee on Justices of the Peace (Scotland)	18	0	0	0	0	18	0
Extra Parliamentary Panel	20	0	0	0	0	20	0
General Teaching Council for Scotland	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
Health Appointments Advisory Committee	5	0	0	0	0	5	0
Hill Farming Advisory committee for Scotland	16	0	0	1	0	16	0
Historic Buildings Council for Scotland	12	0	0	2	0	10	2
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland	5	0	0	0	0	4	1
Local Government Property Commission	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland	3	0	0	0	0	3	0
Police Advisory Board for Scotland	5	0	0	2	0	3	2
Post Qualification Education Board for Health Services Pharmacists in Scotland	10	0	0	0	0	10	0
Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland	12	0	0	0	0	12	0
Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse	19	1	1	0	0	18	0
Scottish Advisory Committee on the Medical Workforce	17	0	1	0	0	15	2
Scottish Agricultural Consultative Panel	15	0	0	0	0	15	0
Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum	20	0	0	0	0	20	0
Scottish Crime Prevention Council	12	1	1	0	0	11	0
Scottish Economic Council	31	0	2	7	0	23	8
Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Board	12	3	0	3	0	9	0
Scottish Police College Board of Governors	18	0	0	2	0	16	2
Scottish Records Advisory Council	12	1	1	1	0	11	1
Scottish Standing Committee for the Calculation of Residual Values of Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs	5	0	0	0	0	4	1
Scottish Studentship Selection Committee	10	0	0	3	0	7	3
Scottish Valuation and Rating Council	11	0	1	0	0	8	3
Secretary of State for Scotland's Advisory Group on Sustainable Development	[2]—	0	1	0	0	9	0
Secretary of State's Advisory Panel of Economic Consultants	[2]—	0	0	2	0	5	4
Secretary of State's (Electricity) Fisheries Committee	7	0	0	0	0	7	0

[1] Life appointments
[2] Not specified.

Fish Farming Colleges

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Drumbeat report and addendum into the future of the Seafield Centre fish farming college at Kishorn, Ross-Shire; if he will list all those industry companies consulted over its compilation; and if he will make a statement; [37882]

(2) what estimate he has made of the projected annual balance sheet of the Seafield Centre fish farming college at Kishorn, Ross-Shire; and if he will make a statement. [37883]

Mr. Wilson: The Drumbeat Report was commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I understand that it is already publicly available and will make arrangements to place copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Seafield Centre is a faculty of Inverness College. The latest audited annual accounts for Inverness College are for 1996–97. The college budget for 1998–99 is still in preparation.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those facilities approved by the Scottish Qualifications Authority in marine aquaculture; what plans he has in respect of the fish farming college at Kishorn, Ross-Shire, Dunstaffnage, Argyll and the North Atlantic Fisheries College at Scalloway, Shetland; and if he will make a statement. [37884]

Mr. Wilson: The Scottish Qualifications Authority approves the following centres to deliver education and training leading to qualifications in various aspects of marine aquaculture.

Aberdeen College

Angus College

The Barony College

Banff and Buchan College of Further Education

Borders College
Dumfries and Galloway College
Dundee College
Elmwood College
Lews Castle College
Inverness College
Shetland College of Further Education
Fish Industry Training Association
Marine Harvest McConnell
North Atlantic Fisheries
Rural Pursuits Ltd
Scottish Aquaculture Training Association
Shetland Fisheries Training Association.

Responsibility for the Seafield Fish Farming Training Centre at Kishorn rests with the Board of Management of Inverness College. The Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory is funded and managed by the Natural Environment Research Council and the North Atlantic Fisheries College is managed by an independent charitable trust. I have no locus to intervene in the future plans for any of these facilities.

Legg-Calves-Perthes Syndrome

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of new cases of Legg-Calves-Perthes syndrome in each of the Scottish health board areas for each of the last five years, indicating the percentage of the population which each of these figures represent. [36812]

Mr. Galbraith: The latest available information by Health Board area, on the number and rate per 100,000 of population of new cases, under 16 years, of Legg-Calves-Perthes Syndrome for each year from 1991 is provided in the table.

Numbers and rate per 100,000 of new cases, aged under 16 years, where a diagnosis of Legg-Calves-Perthes Syndrome was recorded, by area of residence, 1991–1995

	Numbers of discharges					*Rate per 100,000*				
Health board of residence	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Argyll and Clyde	6	5	11	4	4	6.7	5.6	12.3	4.5	4.5
Ayrshire and Arran	8	8	5	7	11	10.3	10.3	6.4	9.0	14.2
Borders	1	3	1	1	1	5.1	15.2	5.0	5.0	4.9
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	3	6	1	3.5	3.5	10.3	20.5	3.4
Fife	8	9	4	4	8	11.2	12.6	5.6	5.5	11.1
Forth Valley	0	3	4	1	2	—	5.5	7.3	1.8	3.6
Grampian	3	3	4	2	2	2.9	2.8	3.7	1.8	1.8
Greater Glasgow	20	19	12	21	24	11.0	10.4	6.6	11.4	13.1
Highland	5	2	5	2	2	11.4	4.5	11.3	4.5	4.5
Lanarkshire	10	10	7	5	9	8.3	8.3	5.8	4.2	7.5
Lothian	11	7	8	7	11	7.9	5.0	5.7	4.9	7.6
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	5	0	3	2	3	6.6	—	3.9	2.6	3.9
Western Isles	2	0	0	1	0	31.9	—	—	16.3	—
Scotland	80	70	67	63	78	7.6	6.8	6.5	6.1	7.5

Source:
ISD Scotland

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *578*, what discussions he has had with individual principals of Scottish *(a)* universities, *(b)* colleges and *(c)* further education colleges regarding the possibility of increasing the proportion of non-Scottish United Kingdom students who are given direct entry into second year; what conclusions were reached; what estimate he has made of the cost to Scottish educational institutions of the resultant reduction in annual full-time equivalent places; and if he will make a statement. [38340]

Mr. Wilson: I have not met the Principal of any Scottish university, higher or further education college specifically to discuss the possibility of increasing the proportion of non-Scottish UK-domiciled students who are given direct entry into second year.

The Report of the Scottish Committee of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the 'Garrick Report') recommended to *higher education providers* that they should clearly specify their requirements for combinations of A levels which will lead to entry with advanced standing within the new qualifications framework. In our response to the Garrick Report, published on 25 February and available from the Library of this House, we welcomed this recommendation. The Government believe that higher education providers should give more consideration for entry into second year for candidates with appropriate combinations of A levels and, in due course, Advanced Highers. However, as this is for the institutions themselves to consider and take forward, no estimate has been made of the cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Abuse

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what programmes and funding are being made available this year by the Government to provide education in schools on the dangers of drug abuse; and if he will indicate the respective contributions of his Department and the Department for Education and Employment. [37367]

Mr. George Howarth: The National Curriculum sets out the minimum requirements for drugs education in schools. Beyond this, it is for individual schools to decide on their drugs education programmes in the light of their needs and circumstances.

The Department for Education and Employment is making £7 million of support available to all local education authorities in England in 1998–99, through the Standards Fund programme, to assist primary and secondary schools and the youth service to deliver effective education about drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. In addition, as part of its £1.9 million annual grants programme, the Home Office Drugs Prevention Initiative is supporting work in a limited number of schools in developing their drugs education programmes. The results of this work will be disseminated nationally over the course of this year.

Youth Justice

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the responses received *(a)* to the draft Crime and Disorder Bill and *(b)* from local authorities on the proposed duty to produce a youth justice plan. [37365]

Mr. Michael: The Government's proposal to place a duty on local authorities with social services and education responsibilities, to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan covering the provision of youth justice services and youth offending teams, was set out in the consultation paper "New National and Local Focus on Youth Crime", published in October. Sixteen local authorities commented specifically on the proposal for a youth justice plan. Overall, they gave a broad welcome to the proposal and commented on the need for proper links between youth justice plans and other local plans, in particular, the children's services plan drawn up by local authorities and the policing plan issued by police authorities. A summary of the responses to the consultation paper was placed in the Library on 15 December 1997.

The proposal for a youth justice plan was reflected in the White Paper "No More Excuses—A New Approach to Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales", published in November, and is now contained in clause 37 of the Crime and Disorder Bill.

The preparation of youth justice plans and their relationship with other local plans will be addressed in guidance to local authorities and the other relevant local agencies.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to whom the proposed youth offending teams will be accountable. [37363]

Mr. Michael: Clause 36 of the Crime and Disorder Bill places the responsibility for establishing youth offending teams on the local authority with education and social services responsibilities in the area. Youth offending teams will therefore be accountable to that local authority for the way they discharge their statutory duties.

In practice, we expect youth offending teams to be accountable to a group of chief officers from the local authority and from those agencies placed under a duty by clause 36 to co-operate with the local authority in establishing a youth offending team. They are the police, the probation service and the health authority. This group will in turn account to the local authority, the police authority, the probation committee and the health authority. It is expected that where there are two tiers of local authority, there would be consultation with the District Authorities and to ensure coherence with the work of Crime Prevention Partnerships and the work of Drug Action Teams.

Clause 37 of the Bill also places a duty on local authorities, after consultation with the police authority, probation committee and health authority, to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan covering the provision of youth offending teams and youth justice services. This plan will be published and submitted to the Youth Justice Board established under clause 38, which will be able to hold the local authority and the other agencies to account for the arrangements for teams and services in their area.

Security Industry

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to regulate the security industry; and if he will make a statement. [37526]

Mr. Michael: We intend to introduce statutory regulation of the private security industry as soon as possible but pressures on Parliamentary time constitute an obstacle to early legislation, as we warned would be the case when we pressed the last Government for early legislation before the election. We have recently completed a consultation exercise with the industry and others on the best way to provide a comprehensive, effective and streamlined system for the whole of the private security industry. It is clear from the responses that there is general support for our approach from the industry itself, as well as from other respondents, and we hope to put forward firm proposals for regulation later this year. Our aim is to build a consensus behind legislative proposals in order to be able to move more quickly and effectively as soon as Parliamentary time becomes available.

Airline Liaison Officers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training or guidance is currently received by airline liaison officers; and how this is provided. [37724]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Airline liaison officers are selected from within an Immigration Service management grade (Chief Immigration Officer) on the basis of experience and suitability against well defined criteria. After selection and before posting, airline liaison officers attend a training course devised and run by the Immigration Service Carriers Liaison Unit, the office responsible for managing the airline liaison officer network. They are also provided with a manual which contains operational guidance and instructions. Airline liaison officers are instructed to contact the Carriers Liaison Unit for advice and guidance whenever necessary.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many airline liaison officers are currently in post overseas; and in which countries they serve. [37722]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office currently has five airline liaison officers based overseas at the British High Commissions in Ghana (Accra), Kenya (Nairobi), India (New Delhi), Sri Lanka (Colombo) and Bangladesh (Dhaka).

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the annual cost is of maintaining airline liaison officers overseas; and what assessment he has made of this expenditure in terms of value for money. [37723]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The budget, including the initial costs of providing the necessary support services for the network of five airline liaison officers, is £925,000 in the first year of operation and £575,000 annually thereafter. The estimated annual saving to the United Kingdom after the first full year of operation is just under £19 million.

Passports (Children)

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on passports for children. [38434]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Following a policy review, I have accepted the Passport Agency's recommendation that, on the grounds of improved security, of making child abduction more difficult, of facilitating travel and of maintaining the Agency's efficiency and effectiveness, all children should be required to hold their own passport. This change in policy will take effect from 5 October 1998, when the Agency plan to begin introducing a new, more secure British passport. Children already included on their parents' passports will not be affected by this change until the passport is changed.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people are currently detained by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; how many have been detained in each of the last five years; and at what annual cost; [38163]

(2) how many of the people detained by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have been detained for longer than three months in each of the last three years. [38165]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Information on persons detained under sole Immigration Act powers in the United Kingdom for longer than three months is available only for the position as at 31 March 1998. As at that date, 350 such persons were recorded as having been detained continuously for over three months.

The available information relating to all persons detained under Immigration Act powers in immigration detention centres and prisons in the United Kingdom at given points in time, is contained in table 1.

The annual costs of detention to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate are given in table 2.

Table 1: Persons recorded as being detained[1] solely under Immigration Act powers in immigration detention centres and prisons in the United Kingdom[2]

As at:	Detained in immigration detention centres	Detained in prison establishments
28 February 1998	[3,4]373	[5]496
31 December 1997	383	465
31 December 1996	[4]493	[6]487
31 December 1995	[4]371	[6]532
31 December 1994	[7]n/a	[6]445
31 December 1993	[7]n/a	[6]545

[1] Persons recorded as being detained under Immigration Act powers on the dates given.
[2] Data exclude persons detained in police cells.
[3] Data exclude persons detained at Dover.
[4] Data exclude persons detained at Harwich.
[5] 1998 prisons data are provisional.
[6] Data exclude persons detained in prisons in Northern Ireland.
[7] Data are not available.

Table 2: Annual costs to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of detention[1,2], 1992–93 to 1996–97

Year	Cost[1] (£ million)
1992–93	4.57
1993–94	7.46
1994–95	11.35
1995–96	13.12
1996–97	17.8

[1] Costs are net costs calculated on an accruals accounting basis. They include staff, accommodation, overheads and full running costs, and take account of depreciation of fixed assets.
[2] The data exclude costs to the Prison Service.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily average cost to public funds of detaining a person by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [38162]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The current average daily cost of detaining a person within the Immigration Service detention estate is £76. Some immigration detainees are held in Prison Service accommodation where the average daily cost in 1996–97 was £68, although these costs are not passed on to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. The quoted costs include headquarters overheads.

Immigration Advisory Service

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what factors underlie the number of staff at the Immigration Advisory Service, Scottish Office; [38158]

(2) what factors underlie the proposed reduction in the number of staff at the Immigration Advisory Service, Scottish Office. [37910]

Ms Quin: The staffing arrangements of the Immigration Advisory Service are a matter for the Trustees.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum cases are dealt with in the Immigration Advisory Service Office based in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* Cardiff, *(c)* Central London, *(d)* Gatwick, *(e)* Glasgow, *(f)* Hounslow, *(g)* Leeds and *(h)* Manchester. [37911]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table.

Asylum appeals disposed of by the Immigration Advisory Service, by office

	March 1997-February 1998
Birmingham	53
Cardiff	8
Central London[1]	423
Glasgow	19
Hounslow	536
Leeds	10
Manchester	48

[1] Includes Detention Unit.

There is no Immigration Advisory Service office at Gatwick.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the availability of free advice on immigration and asylum law in Scotland. [38159]

Ms Quin: The Immigration Advisory Service receives a grant from the Home Office under section 23 of the Immigration Act 1971. It is open to appellants in Scotland to seek free advice from the Immigration Advisory Service or from any other voluntary organisation.

Internet Watch Foundation

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *516*, who will undertake the review of the Internet Watch Foundation; what arrangements are being made to allow interested parties to submit their views to the review team; and if the report will be published. [37142]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The review will be undertaken by outside consultants. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has the lead in taking forward the review in view of that Department's responsibility for regulation of the industry, and has the full support of the Home Office. DTI officials will be meeting representatives from the Home Office, Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and National Children's Homes (Action for Children) after Easter to discuss the finer details of the review. However, it is envisaged that the review will focus on:

Progress on the removal of illegal material, including the number of reports received, time taken to turn them around, compliance of Internet Service Providers with IWF advice and the possibility of establishing a system to provide more reliable feedback on results;

Structure of the IWF and representation of interested parties.

Next priorities for IWF—a broader focus than child pornography. New priorities might include adult pornography, racism, breaches of copyright and protection from legal but potentially harmful material;

Awareness of the Internet industry and consumers of the IWF and or rating and filtering tools for self protection and how far this awareness translates into usage.

Once the full specification of the review has been agreed, applications will be invited from interested parties who may wish to carry out the review. It will be open to anyone who wishes to do so to submit views to the team which is appointed. The report of the review is likely to be published in the Autumn.

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *516*, if he will extend the review of the operations of the Internet Watch Foundation to include an assessment of the effectiveness of the current procedures of *(a)* the Metropolitan Police, *(b)* other police forces and *(c)* the National Criminal Intelligence Service, in responding to reports on potentially illegal child pornography from the IWF. [37141]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The focus of the review announced by the Government on 3 March will be the work of the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), its structure and composition, the effectiveness of its arrangements for dealing with reports of potentially illegal material, extension of its priorities for action and promoting awareness of its work.

The review will look at the effectiveness of the administrative procedures for passing on information about potentially illegal material to individual police forces and for collating information about the use to which the information has been put, including resulting prosecutions. Any procedural difficulties will be highlighted in the report. The operational effectiveness of the Metropolitan Police, other police forces and the National Criminal Intelligence Service in responding to reports which they receive from the IWF on potentially illegal child pornography is beyond the scope of the current proposals.

The efficiency of the police response to the information received from IWF is a matter for the force concerned.

British Horseracing Board

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the British Horseracing Board. [37745]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* My right hon. Friend has not met the British Horseracing Board (BHB). The Home Office has regular contact with the BHB at official level. I expect to be meeting Board members soon and I have had several informal contacts with members of the Board.

Fraud

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the Law Commission to review the law on fraud. [38520]

Mr. Straw: I have today asked the Law Commission to undertake a review of the law on fraud. The terms of reference for this review are:

"As part of their programme of work on dishonesty, to examine the law on fraud, and in particular to consider whether it

is readily comprehensible to juries;

is adequate for effective prosecution;

is fair to potential defendants;

meets the need of developing technology including electronic means of transfer;

and to make recommendations to improve the law in these respects with all due expedition. In making these recommendations to consider whether a general offence of fraud would improve the criminal law."

Fire Safety

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the report of the Community Fire Safety Task Force in relation to fire safety in England and Wales. [38521]

Mr. George Howarth: I am pleased to announce today that the Government have accepted all the main recommendations of the Community Fire Safety Task Force.

We have pledged quite clearly our determination and commitment to providing safer communities. The fire service has a vital role to play in helping to achieve a safer society, not just by fighting fires, but by reducing the number of fires, deaths and casualties.

The Community Fire Safety Task Force were established to advise on a new strategy for England and Wales to reduce significantly the incidence of fire in the home. The report they produced last November was welcomed as an enormous opportunity both for the Government and the fire service to reduce the pain and suffering caused by dwelling fires.

I made it clear when the report was published that we wanted to hear the views of chief officers, fire authorities and the Unions, all of whom have a crucial role to play in translating the strategy into action. I am pleased to say that the response to the Task Force report has provided a strong mandate for almost all of their key proposals and for a refocusing of effort towards prevention and safety.

I am writing to those same organisations today to explain how we intend to take the strategy forward. In particular, I want to see the efforts of Government, fire authorities and other local agencies integrated and co-ordinated as the Task Force recommended, so that the whole effort achieves more than the sum of its parts. We shall be taking steps to put these arrangements in place shortly. I also accept, with the strong endorsement of the fire service, the recommendation that community fire safety should be made a statutory duty.

Community Fire Safety must become a core activity of the fire service, and we must work in partnership with other agencies and with business to eliminate preventable fires. The success of this approach will mean a safer society for us all.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish a Management Statement for the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [38522]

Mr. Michael: The Management Statement for the Criminal Cases Review Commission has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. The Statement sets out the mission and objectives of the Commission, its accountability to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and, through my right hon. Friend to Parliament, and the division of responsibilities between the Commission and the Home Office. The Management Statement is a key document for any non-departmental public body, and I commend that for the Commission to the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Firearms

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to ban handguns in Northern Ireland. [32572]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *608*.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she will publish legislative proposals arising from the review of the Firearms (NI) Order 1981. [32811]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 March 1998]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *608*.

Irish Medium Education

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council has discussed Irish-medium education; and if she will make a statement. [33593]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Education and Culture Sub-Committee of the Anglo Irish Intergovernmental Council regularly discusses Irish-medium education. At its meetings on 7 February, 8 May and 14 November, it discussed the inclusion of the Irish language in the National curriculum in English schools.

The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference has discussed Irish- medium education at 6 meetings since the beginning of 1995. The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was established under the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council.

Housing Development

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on her policy with respect to *(a)* building on green belt land and *(b)* the proportion of brownfield sites to be used for future housing. [37161]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Policy on buildings on green belt land in Northern Ireland is set out in the publication "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", published in September 1993, a copy of which is available in the Library.

The draft Regional strategic Framework will be issued for public consideration within the next few months and this document will address, among other matters, the question of the use of recycled land.

Staff Appointments

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which staff appointments in *(a)* her Private Office, *(b)* the Northern Ireland Office and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Civil Service are subject to her personal choice. [37164]

Marjorie Mowlam: Appointments made in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Civil Service are made on the basis of merit and through fair and open competition.

As Secretary of State I do not engage in the process by which staff in the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Civil Service are selected for appointment. However, my approval is obtained before some selections for appointment are finalised. These posts include those at NI Permanent Secretary level, some in my Private Office (as recommended by Dr. Maurice Hayes in his 1997 report on "Staff Deployment in the NICS"), where the nature of the work and the working relationship involved make it appropriate to do so.

The post of Head of the NI Civil Service and the three most senior posts in the NIO are subject to approval by the Prime Minister.

Incomes

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the average *(a)* annual income and *(b)* hourly rate of pay in Northern Ireland. [37264]

Mr. Ingram: In 1996–97 the average annual income in Northern Ireland was £9,530. The latest earning figures available are for April 1997 at which date the average hourly rate of pay for adult employees (both full and part-time) was £7.58.

Source:

Incomes—Northern Ireland Family Expenditure Survey 1996–97
Earnings—Northern Ireland New Earnings Survey, April 1997.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of those employed in Northern Ireland earn less than £4 per hour; and if she will make a statement. [37265]

Mr. Ingram: The latest figures available are for April 1997 at which date 17.8 per cent. of adult employees (both full and part-time) earned less than £4.00 (excluding overtime) per hour.

Source:

Northern Ireland New Earnings Survey, April 1997.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the impact of a minimum wage in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [37266]

Mr. Ingram: The Government have appointed the Low Pay Commission to gather evidence, assess it and make recommendations in relation to the National Minimum Wage. The Commission visited Northern Ireland in October for that purpose. My Department has also contributed fully to the UK-wide Government evidence presented to the Commission. The Commission has received the recent NIEC report on the extent and nature of low pay in Northern Ireland. The report shows Northern Ireland to be significantly more affected by low pay than other UK regions. The National Minimum Wage will therefore have particular importance for Northern Ireland.

Peace Line, Belfast

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will take measures to reinstate those sections of the peace line in north and west Belfast which have been taken down in recent months; and if she will make a statement. [37784]

Mr. Ingram: No sections of the peaceline in north and west Belfast have been taken down by the security forces in recent months. Any sections removed or damaged by unauthorised persons are repaired immediately.

Housing

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the Housing Executive's capital programme each year since 1987–88 has been spent on accommodation in *(a)* Catholic/nationalist and *(b)* Protestant/unionist areas. [37783]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Housing Executive capital schemes are developed on the basis of targeting those in greatest need through an objective assessment of housing requirements. No information is recorded on a religious apportionment of those programmes.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Housing Executive dwellings in Belfast are currently unoccupied by tenants to whom the Housing Executive has let these properties; and if she will make a statement. [37782]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose Chief Executive has advised me that, at 31 March 1998, the Executive is aware of 93 properties let to tenants, but unoccupied. Of these 72 are temporarily unoccupied while major improvements are carried out. The remaining 21 are the subject of Abandonment Notices, the Executive having evidence that the properties are not being used by the tenant as their main home. Abandonment Notices are served following a thorough investigation and are the culmination of a legal process to recover the property.

Paramilitary Activity (Collusion Allegations)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will seek the advice of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Legal, Summary and Arbitrary Executions on the conduct of an investigation into allegations of collusion between members of the security forces and paramilitary groups. [37740]

Marjorie Mowlam: No. We have national experts well placed to offer any necessary advice and to make recommendations on the issues that a UN Rapporteur would be likely to cover.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average RUC call out and response time over the past four years for each category of reported incident. [37807]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not currently available. However the Command and Control system is designed to provide such information; its installation is ongoing and should be completed province-wide by October 1998.

Referendum Campaign

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she plans to sanction her Department's Director of Information's proposals relating to a possible referendum campaign, with particular reference to the involvement of the Archbishop of Armagh; if she will place a copy of the proposals in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [37820]

Marjorie Mowlam: The proposals drawn up in relation to a possible referendum campaign will be considered in the light of events. If a referendum is to be held, some of the proposals will be implemented and others will be considered.

However, as I have made clear, Dr. Eames had no knowledge of the communications document. I have also assured Archbishop Eames that at no stage was there any intention or suggestion that anyone in the NIO was seeking to bring any pressure on him or any other church leader in terms of what they might say about the talks process or anything else. I greatly respect Dr. Eames and his independence as a Church leader as I do his integrity and that of the other Church leaders.

The main point of the paper was to develop a strategy for informing the Northern Ireland public about the content of any agreement so that individual voters can make up their own minds. A public information telephone line has already been set up for this purpose.

As the leaked document was an internal working paper I do not intend to place it in the Library of the House.

Mediation Network

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 27, what evaluation she made, prior to granting funding to Mediation Network, of evidence that one of its advisers is a member of a United States religious sect. [37822]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

"Women Seen and Heard"

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will place a copy of the document "Women Seen and Heard" in the Library. [37178]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* I have made arrangements to have copies of this Report placed in the Library.

Life Sentence Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the reasons for the revocation of licences for each of the 18 former life sentence prisoners for whom this is applicable. [37181]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Statute provides that the licence of an indeterminate sentence prisoner can be revoked at any time by the Secretary of State. In each case, the overriding reason for licence revocation was for the protection of the public.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the members of the Life Sentence Review Board, indicating their profession, qualifications and perceived religious/community background and the declarations of interest each has registered. [37175]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Life Sentence Review Board is not a statutory body and there is no formal registration requirement on its members.

The Life Sentence Review Board is chaired by the Permanent Under Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, Mr. Joe Pilling, and includes among its members senior Northern Ireland Office officials, a psychologist and a medical officer of the Department of Health and Social Services. The Chief Probation Officer and a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist attend the Board in a professional advisory capacity. The Governors of HMP Maze and HMP Maghaberry also attend.

The identities of the members of the Board, with the exception of the Permanent Under Secretary, are not made public for security reasons. The members of the Board are all full-time civil servants drawn from both the Home Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Their membership is by virtue of the posts they hold within the Northern Ireland Office, including the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

It would be inappropriate to disclose the perceived community background of the individual members of the Review Board. The confidentiality of monitoring information is protected under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

As already indicated, among the members of the Board, are a professionally qualified Psychologist and medical practitioner.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates the two life-sentence prisoners released on licence were subsequently reconvicted for scheduled offences; and what their present position is as regards sentence. [37180]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Of the two prisoners re-convicted for serious terrorist offences, one was sentenced on 17 December 1993 and the other on 18 May 1995. Following licence revocation each has resumed the status of an indeterminate sentence prisoner. The stage at which each case will be reviewed by the Life Sentence Review Board will be determined by means of periodical review in accordance with normal life sentence review procedures.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times, and on what dates, the Life Sentence Review Board has met in the last three years; and how many cases it has considered on each occasion. [37174]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Life Sentence Review Board meets five times per year. The other information requested is set out in the table.

Date of meeting	*Number of cases*
7 February 1995	5
4 April 1995	10
6 June 1995	9
17 October 1995	9
12 December 1995	8
20 February 1996	7
23 April 1996	5
11 June 1996	12
22 October 1996	13
10 December 1996	10
18 February 1997	7
29 April 1997	6
9 June 1997[1]	8
14 and 15 October 1997[1]	19
9 December 1997	12

[1] One individual case was considered at two successive meetings during 1997 as the Board requested additional information.

Note:

Some cases will, of course, have been considered more than once during this 3 year time span where the Board deferred them for periods of one or two years.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the cost of resolving the millennium computer problem in the National Health Service; how much money has been spent on this to date; and if she will make a statement. [37933]

Mr. Worthington: The cost of resolving the millennium computer problem in the Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services currently stands at £5 million in respect of Information Management and Technology (IM&T) systems. No estimates are yet available for non-IT equipment.

There are as yet no records of what has been spent to date. This will become clear in the next returns due from HPSS organisations in May 1998.

The HSS Executive has been promoting awareness of HPSS Year 2000 issues since 1996. The HPSS programme is broadly in line with the GB timescale and the requirement for regular updates on progress will fall into line with GB from the next return date which is due in June 1998. It is not expected that compliance of all equipment will be achieved by the December 1998 target date. Preparations should however be complete in time for the millennium.

Water Service

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the perceived religious affiliation breakdown of the persons who were interviewed by the last promotion board of the Northern Ireland Water Service for professional and technical staff; [38097]

(2) how many persons appeared before the last promotion board for the Northern Ireland Water Service; and how many of those have since been promoted; [38138]

(3) by how much she intends to increase water charges to each class of consumer; what sums she intends to raise in total; and for what purposes such sums will be used; [38083]

(4) how many officers of each professional and technical grade are employed at Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters; [38096]

(5) how many persons at what grades are employed in design in *(a)* the Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters and *(b)* in each division; and from where and by whom the persons working in the divisions are supervised; [38090]

(6) if she will publish a table to show the religious affiliation breakdown of each grade of staff in each of the Northern Ireland Water Service divisions and at Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters; [38091]

(7) what checks are carried out on claims made as to qualifications held by persons employed in each professional and technical grade and in each administrative grade in the Northern Ireland Water Service; [38092]

(8) if she will publish a table to show for each of the Northern Ireland Water Service divisions the number of *(a)* professional and technical officers, *(b)* higher professional and technical officers and *(c)* senior professional and technical officers employed, indicating the equivalent figures for the administration in each division and giving the dates of the last promotion board for these posts; [38093]

(9) what reports on the Northern Ireland Water Service have been published by *(a)* the Fair Employment Agency and *(b)* the Fair Employment Commission; [38094]

(10) how many persons are employed at Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters; and at what grade. [38095]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Water Service under its chief executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. William Ross, dated 7 April 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about Water Service staffing and charging issues.

I shall answer each in the order of their receipt, and because some are very closely interlinked and worded I think it is necessary, to ensure clarity, that I should set out the question in full before each answer.

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what was the perceived religious affiliation breakdown of the persons who were interviewed by the last promotion board of the Northern Ireland Water Service for professional and technical staff.

Because of its duties of confidentiality to its staff the Department does not publish data on individual promotion competitions from which their religious affiliation could be deduced. Unauthorised disclosure of such information would constitute an offence under Section 19 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. However, aggregated information is available in the Sixth Report of the Equal Opportunities Unit. A copy of this is available in the House of Commons Library.

2. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many persons appeared before the last promotion board for the Northern Ireland Water Service; and how many of those have since been promoted.

Five people were interviewed for the post of Telemetry Operations, Supervisor Professional Technical Officer level within Northern Division and one has since been promoted into this post.

3. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, by how much she intends to increase water charges to each class of consumer; what sums she intends to raise in total; and for what purposes such sums will be used.

The annual revision of the Water Service's metered water charges, paid by industrial commercial and agricultural users, and trade effluent charges paid by dischargers, has just taken place. The proposed new rates for 1998/99 are as follows:

Metered Water Charges

The proposed volumetric charge for 1998/99 is 72.34 pence per cubic metre. This is an increase of 6.28% on the 1997/98 charges of 68.13 pence. The standing charges for metered supplies have not been increased. They remain within the annual charge rate of £46 for a supply pipe of 15 mm or less, up to £1502 for a supply pipe greater than 100 mm.

Trade Effluent Charges

The proposed standard trade effluent charge for 1998/99 remains at the level for 1997/98. This is 37.06 pence per cubic metre. While the standard charge has not altered overall there has been re-adjustment of the components that make it up under the "Mogden Formula", which is the standard water industry methodology for calculating this charge. These charge components are reception and conveyance, volumetric treatment, biological treatment, sludge treatment and disposal. These adjustments could affect the bills of trade effluent dischargers upwards or downwards depending upon the volume and strength of their effluents.

It is estimated that the sums raised by these charges during 1998/99 will be approximately £30 million for metered water and £3.9 million for trade effluent. These charges are levied to ensure that those businesses using these facilities pay proportionately for the services they receive and that cross-subsidisation amongst consumers is reduced. A portion of the metered water charge increase is designed to continue the phased reduction of an historic element of cross-subsidy of metered water users by regional ratepayers.

4. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many officers of each professional and technical grade are employed at Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters.

The information requested is shown in the table.

	Number
Grade 3	1
Grade 5	3
Grade 6	3
Principal Professional Technical Officer	7
Senior Professional Technical Officer	18
Higher Professional Technical Officer	9
Professional Technical Officer	4
Senior Principal Scientific Officer	1
Principal Scientific Officer	3
Senior Scientific Officer	3

5. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many persons at what grades are employed in design in (a) the Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters and (b) in each division; and from where and by whom the persons working in the divisions are supervised.

Design staff are not grouped within Water Service Headquarters or within its operational Divisions. They all come under Water Service's Development Directorate and its senior level management. They are located on either a team or $\frac{1}{2}$ team basis at 4 centres, Ballymena, Belfast, Craigavon and Londonderry. Each team, or $\frac{1}{2}$ team, is supervised by its senior officer at the location. Details of the staff by grade and location are tabled below.

	Grade 6	*PPTO*	*SPTO*	*HPTO*	*PTO*	*O'level trainee*	*TGI*
Belfast	1	3	5	23	15	6	*2
Ballymena			1	3	3	2	
Craigavon		1	1	6	$4\frac{1}{2}$	2	
Londonderry			1	4	3	3	

* Technical Grade 1

6. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will publish a table to show the religious affiliation breakdown of each grade of staff in each of the Northern Ireland Water Service divisions and at Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters.

Because of its duties of confidentiality the Department does not publish information at the level of disaggregation requested. However, information on composition by grade at Departmental level is available in the Sixth Report of the Equal Opportunities Unit, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. The Northern Ireland Civil Service is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to appointment and progression on merit.

7. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what checks are carried out on claims made as to qualifications held by persons employed in each professional and technical grade and in each administrative grade in the Northern Ireland Water Service.

Upon recruitment, or when gaining qualifications in-service, Water Service staff are required to submit for inspection the original certification relating to their qualifications.

8. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will publish a table to show for each of the Northern Ireland Water Service divisions the number of (a) professional and technical officers, (b) higher professional and technical officers and (c) senior professional and technical officers employed, indicating the equivalent figures for the administration in each division and giving the dates of the last promotion board for these posts.

The information requested is shown in the table.

Division	*PTO/executive officer 1*		*HPTO/staff officer*		*SPTO/deputy principal*	
Northern	54	2	19	2	7	1
Southern	54	2	18	2	7	1
Eastern	94	4	35	3	14	[1]1
Western	52	2	19	2	7	1

[1] Vacant

The dates of the last promotion boards for these grades are as follows:

	Date
SPTO Civil Engineer	September 1996
HPTO Civil Engineer	June 1997
PTO Civil Engineer	September 1996
SPTO Mechanical and Electrical	August 1996
HPTO Mechanical and Electrical	June 1997
PTO Mechanical and Electrical	September 1996
Deputy Principal	May 1992
Staff Officer	May 1993
Executive Officer I	September 1993

9. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what reports on the Northern Ireland Water Service have been published by (a) the Fair Employment Agency and (b) the Fair Employment Commission.

The Fair Employment Commission, which succeeded the Fair Employment Agency in 1989, has advised that it does not produce reports on individual Departments or Agencies but takes the Northern Ireland Civil Service as a whole for monitoring purposes.

10. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many persons are employed at Northern Ireland Water Service Headquarters; and at what grade.

The information requested is listed below:

Professional and Technical	*Number*
Chief Executive	1
Grade 5	3
Grade 6	3
Principal Professional Technical Officer	7
Senior Professional Technical Officer	18
Higher Professional Technical Officer	9
Principal Technical Officer	4
Senior Principal Scientific Officer	1
Principal Scientific Officer	3
Senior Scientific Officer	3

Administrative	*Number*
Grade 5	2
Grade 6	0
Grade 7	6
Deputy Principal	8
Staff Officer	11
Executive Officer 1	10
Executive Officer 2	21
Administrative Officer	39
Administrative Assistant	17
Support Grade Band 1	2
Support Grade Band 2	4
Typing Manager	1
Senior Personal Secretary	1
Personal Secretary	3
Typist	6

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of those promoted in each of the professional and technical grades since the last Northern Ireland Water Service promotion board fall into each religious affiliation category. [38137]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For reasons of confidentiality, information on religious affiliation is not published at the level of disaggregation requested. However, aggregated information on the outcome of promotion boards by occupational group can be obtained from the Sixth Report of the Equal Opportunities Unit, a copy of which is in the Library.

Parades Commission

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the names and addresses of the persons appointed as facilitators to aid the Parades Commission, indicating the level of payments to be made to them and the areas which have been allocated to them. [38087]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 7 authorised officers acting in a part-time capacity on behalf of the Parades Commission. Their task is to gather information on disputes surrounding parades across Northern Ireland and to monitor developments within various locations. They will also assist with attempts to achieve local accommodation.

The authorised officers are employed, trained and monitored by the Mediation Network for Northern Ireland and act on behalf of the Parades Commission, which is charged for this service. Their names are known to various groups in particular locations where they are currently assigned, but, given the sensitive nature of their work, I do not consider it appropriate to publish a list of their names and addresses.

Authorised officers are currently working in the following areas:

Belfast
Pomeroy
Bellaghy
Dunloy
Strabane
Newtownbutler
Roslea
Armagh
Keady
Newry
Lurgan
Ballycastle
Crumlin.

Utilities (Charges)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the percentage by which the cost of *(a)* water, *(b)* household coal, *(c)* gas and *(d)* electricity for (i) domestic and (ii) industrial consumers in Northern Ireland varies from the average cost of *(a)* to (d) in Great Britain. [38084]

Mr. Ingram: The information is as follows:

(a) The regional rate contribution to water and sewerage services for the average domestic ratepayer in Northern Ireland 1997–98 was approximately 4 per cent. higher than the equivalent average figure in Scotland and approximately 46 per cent. lower than the average for England and Wales.

The charge to industrial consumers for metered water was 68.13p/m^3 in Northern Ireland in 1997/98 compared with regional charges ranging from 38.5p/m^3 to 109.15 p/m^3 in GB.

(b) An average figure indicating the percentage by which the cost of household coal in Northern Ireland varies from that in GB is not available.

(c) Domestic gas prices in Northern Ireland are approximately 8 per cent. higher than the corresponding average price in Great Britain.

(d) Domestic electricity prices in Northern Ireland and approximately 22 per cent. higher than the corresponding average price in Great Britain.

Comparisons of gas and electricity prices for industrial consumers are not possible as they are subject to confidential contracts between gas and electricity suppliers and consumers in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Inward Investment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions the IDB has taken persons and firms considering inward investment to Northern Ireland to *(a)* each parliamentary constituency and *(b)* each council area in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years or each of the last three financial years if more convenient. [38086]

Mr. Ingram: The information required to answer part *(a)* is not available and would incur disproportionate costs to extract. Visits arranged by IDB to Northern Ireland District Council Areas for potential inward investors in the years 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97 are as follows:

Visit to district council areas by potential inward investors

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Antrim	26	18	34
Ards	5	3	10
Armagh	1	1	4
Ballymena	13	3	0
Ballymoney	3	1	3
Banbridge	2	3	1
Belfast	65	55	62
Carrickfergus	13	7	22
Castlereagh	1	8	6
Coleraine	5	3	7
Cookstown	4	17	10
Craigavon	12	16	15
Derry	18	30	32
Down	10	2	3
Dungannon	13	9	4
Fermanagh	3	11	15
Larne	6	4	1
Limavady	3	2	7
Lisburn	19	41	31
Magherafelt	3	4	0
Moyle	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	15	16	9
Newtownabbey	17	19	22
North Down	4	9	3
Omagh	2	6	8
Strabane	2	9	10
Total	265	297	319

CRISP Scheme, Dungiven

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cost of the CRISP scheme presently being carried out on Main Street, Dungiven; and how much of the total cost falls to *(a)* the IFI, *(b)* the DOE, *(c)* the Roads Service, *(d)* Limavady Council, *(e)* NIE and *(f)* BT. [38082]

Mr. Paul Murphy: DOE's contribution from CRISP funds and its environmental improvement budget was £121,500. Roads Service costs were £25,000. The local group, who let the contract for the CRISP scheme, negotiated contributions from IFI, Limavady Council, NIE and BT but the precise amounts contributed are for these bodies to disclose.

Driving Licences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons in Northern Ireland hold a driving licence; what percentage this represents of all persons of the age of 17 years or over, broken down into those age bands used by the licensing authority. [38085]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to Driver and Vehicle Licensing of Northern Ireland, under its chief executive, Mr. Brendan Magee. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Brendan Magee to Mr. William Ross, dated 6 April 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question requesting information on the number of people in Northern Ireland holding driving licences.

As at 3 April 1998 there were 1,082,936 licence holders on DVLNI's Driver Licensing computer system. This figure included provisional and full licences, individuals who have moved from Northern Ireland but where we have not been notified of the move, and some deceased where we have not been informed of their death.

The figure of 1,082,936 represents 88.7% of the population of Northern Ireland who are over 17 years of age.

The age bands used by DVLNI are above and below age 70. There are 987,466 licence holders aged below 70 and 95,470 above 70 years of age.

Banks

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will investigate allegations of overcharging practices in Northern Ireland banks. [38088]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to investigate such allegations. The Northern Irish bank, against which most of the allegations of overcharging have been made, has announced that it will carry out its own investigation and that it will make the results public. If evidence of overcharging is found it will take appropriate action and the customers involved will be compensated.

HEALTH

Health Records (Access)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will assess the advantages of recommending a reasonable level of photocopy charges to be paid by patients seeking access to their records under the Access to Health Records Act 1990; and if he will make a statement. [27827]

Mr. Milburn: The Access to Health Records Act 1990 requires that charges should not exceed the cost of making a copy and posting it, and guidance to National Health Service organisations has made it quite clear that the actual cost is the maximum that should be charged. The actual cost will differ from case to case and can be determined only by the specific organisation involved. Recommending a charge greater than the actual cost in

any particular case would contravene the requirements of the Act, and recommending charges consistently lower than actual costs would increase NHS costs. Therefore, the responsibility for determining reasonable charges must remain with individual organisations.

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the quantity of *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* electricity purchased for the heating, lighting and powering of all accommodation occupied by his Department within the United Kingdom in each year since 1989–90; and what was the total cost in real terms for *(a)* to (c) in each year. [36167]

Ms Jowell: Since 1990 the Department has monitored and recorded its energy consumption and costs on a basis agreed with the former Department of the Environment. The figures cover the majority of the administrative estate for which the Department has been directly responsible. They are reported annually to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and are set out in the table.

Year	*Electricity kWh*	*Gas kWh*	*Oil kWh*	*Total cost (£)*
1990–91	7,733,992	4,771,754	7,427,420	730,828
1991–92	12,397,391	4,576,815	11,525,359	1,142,684
1992–93	8,304,219	4,461,932	6,904,257	813,902
1993–94	18,351,290	10,389,944	2,972,420	1,293,000
1994–95	16,917,569	7,834,399	3,236,470	1,037,544
1995–96	12,358,600	5,422,533	1,732,100	801,192
1996–97	11,781,418	4,934,916	1,371,640	722,641

Information for 1997–98 is not yet available.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of mesothelioma and asbestos-related diseases have been reported during each of the last three years. [37061]

Mr. Boateng: Neither condition is reportable under a system of statutory notification but several sources of data are available which are indicative of the numbers suffering from these diseases.

The Department collects data in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) on the number of hospital admissions and day cases per year classified by disease. They will not accurately reflect the number of new cases in that year because some patients will have readmissions following diagnosis in earlier years, some have multiple admissions in a year, and some are treated as hospital out patients or may not go to hospital at all and so do not feature in HES data. The table gives information on hospital admissions and day cases for the three most recent years available for mesothelioma and asbestos-related disease.

Additional data on new mesothelioma cases are available from the national cancer registration system which strives for complete case ascertainment. The most recent data available are for 1989–91.

Total number of new cases of mesothelioma, England and Wales, 1989–1991

Year	
1989	835
1990	855
1991	941

Source:
ONS

The Department of Social Security has data on the number of new claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit made each year but they will exclude those who have these diseases but do not claim benefit.

Figures of the numbers of diagnosed cases of asbestos-related diseases, made in connection with claims to industrial injuries disablement benefit are shown in the table:

Year	*Mesothelioma*	*Other asbestos-related diseases*[1]
1994	583	649
1995	685	670
1996	642	698

[1] For Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, it is accepted that, (apart from mesothelioma), the other asbestos-related diseases are pneumoconiosis (where the causative agent is asbestos), carcinoma of the lung and bilateral diffuse pleural thickening.

Source:
DSS (Analytical Services Division) 100 per cent. count.

Ordinary admissions and day cases: completed episodes primary diagnosis in NHS hospitals, England 1993–94 to 1995–96

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
ICD 9 code:			
158 Malignant neoplasm of:			
1588 Specified parts of peritoneum	250	213	—
1589 Peritoneum, unspecified	204	222	—
163 Malignant neoplasm of pleura	1,906	1,893	—
501 Asbestosis	178	186	—
England	2,538	2,513	—
ICD 10 code:			
J61 Pneumoconiosis due to asbestos and other mineral fibres	—	—	154
J92.0 Pleural plaque with presence of asbestos	—	—	61
C45.0 Mesothelioma of pleura	—	—	972
C45.1 Mesothelioma of peritoneum	—	—	74
C45.2 Mesothelioma of pericardium	—	—	3
C45.7 Mesothelioma of other site	—	—	178
C45.9 Mesothelioma, unspecified	—	—	944
D19.0 Mesothelial tissue of pleural	—	—	29
England	—	—	2,415

Note:
Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Mental Illness

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the availability of care for those suffering from mental illness. [37258]

Mr. Boateng: We have established the independent reference group to consider long stay hospital closure plans to ensure no more hospitals are closed without proper or alternative services being available.

Breast Screening

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many breast units using two view mammography at all breast screening rounds *(a)* reached and *(b)* failed to reach the national expected standard for breast cancer detection last year; [37527]

(2) how many breast units using single view mammography at incident breast screening rounds *(a)* reached and *(b)* failed to reach the national expected standard for breast cancer detection last year. [37528]

Mr. Boateng: All of the eight breast screening units in the United Kingdom currently using two-view mammography at all breast screening rounds met the target standardised cancer detection ratio last year. Of the 87 breast screening units in the UK using single view mammography at incident breast screening rounds, 62 achieved the target standardised breast cancer detection ratio.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the cost per cancer detected of single view mammography at incident breast screening rounds last year; [37530]

(2) what was the cost per cancer detected of two view mammography at incident breast screening rounds last year. [37532]

Mr. Boateng: The National Health Service breast screening programme has commissioned a study to look at the cost effectiveness of both single-view and two-view mammography. The results of this study are expected later this year.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of additional breast cancers which would be detected per year if two view mammography were undertaken at incident breast screening rounds in all breast units; [37529]

(2) what plans he has to review national guidance on the use of two view mammography for breast screening. [37542]

Mr. Boateng: All breast screening units currently take two mammographic views of the breast at a woman's first visit to the screening programme, and it is open to them to use two-view mammography at subsequent screening rounds.

The cancer screening evaluation unit, which is funded by the Department, is currently reviewing the advantages of two view mammography for all screening rounds. This review is due to be completed later this year. We will assess the case for requiring all units to take views at every screening round in the light of the findings of this review. This assessment will also take account of the outcome of research currently being carried out into other changes that might be made to improve the quality of the service offered to women. This research covers extending the breast screening programme to invite women aged 40–50, routinely inviting women aged 65 and over, and reducing the interval between screens.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie the higher standardised detection ratio for the first round of breast screening relative to subsequent rounds. [37832]

Mr. Boateng: The breast screening programme was introduced in 1988, and so far it has greater experience of taking and reading mammograms at a woman's first screen than at subsequent screens. In addition, since August 1995 all breast screening units have been required to take two mammographic views of the breast at a woman's first screen. Both these factors are likely to underlie the higher standardised detection ration for the first round of screening relative to subsequent rounds.

NHS Heating Fuel

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of expenditure on heating fuel in the NHS for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [37839]

Mr. Milburn: The Department's National Health Service Estates agency collects information on fuels used for energy in the NHS. This includes gas, oil, coal and electricity used to provide NHS trusts total energy requirement for lighting, heating and ventilation, power etc. Information is not collected separately on heating fuel.

The estimated cost of energy for NHS trusts in England for 1997–98 is £190,220,554. For 1998–99 it is £184,042,841.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the community hospitals which are currently the subject of a consultation process with a view to their closure. [37849]

Mr. Milburn: It is difficult to define comprehensively what is meant by "community" or "cottage" hospital. They differ from place to place in the scale, range and volume of services they offer. What characterises nearly all is that they provide a local service and admit patients under the care of a general practitioner.

The following community hospitals are currently the subject of a consultation process:

Anglia & Oxford

Burford and Wallingford/Watlington Community Hospital, Oxfordshire

Bartlett Hospital, Felixstowe

North Western

None

North Thames

William Julian Courtauld Hospital (part of Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust)[1]

Northern & Yorkshire

None

South Thames

None

South & West

Winsford Hospital

Fowey Hospital[2]

Edward Hain Hospital, St. Ives[2]

St. Barnabas Hospital, Saltash[2]

Poltair Hospital[2]

Trent

Bourne Hospital, Bourne[3]

Horncastle War Memorial, Horncastle[3]

Johnson Hospital or Welland Hospital, Spalding[3]

West Midlands

None.

[1] This hospital is proposed to close but a new one, going by the same name would be built on a different site.

[2] Part of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority proposals.

[3] Have been the subject of formal public consultation which has now ended, although the Health Authority is still consulting local Community Health Councils about the final details.

Abortion

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many medical students undertaking training in obstetrics and gynaecology have refused to be involved in abortion procedures on grounds of conscience in each year since 1990; [37800]

(2) how many general practitioners have refused to be involved in referrals for abortion on grounds of conscience in each year since 1990; [37801]

(3) how many consultants in obstetrics and gynaecology have refused to take part in abortion procedures on grounds of conscience in each year since 1990. [37799]

Ms Jowell: This information is not collected centrally. We have no reason to believe that the current arrangements for conscientious objections are not in general working well. We have received very few complaints about the operation of the conscience clause, which indicates that the issue is being dealt with sensitively and sensibly.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions general practitioners with a conscientious objection must take to fulfil their duty of care when a patient requests referral for abortion. [37802]

Ms Jowell: In 1991 the General Medical Services Council of the British Medical Association issued guidance to general practitioners through local medical committees, reminding them of their obligations under their terms of service. This guidance remains extant and general practitioners who have a conscientious objection to abortion should refer the patient to another doctor as soon as possible.

Children

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend guidance under the Children Act 1989 on care plans and reviews applied to children placed in respite care services, with particular reference to disabled children; and what recent research on such issues his Department has evaluated. [37673]

Mr. Boateng: The Children Act and guidance set out local authorities' responsibilities in respect of drawing up care plans for, and reviewing the care of looked after children, including disabled children. In August 1995 the Department announced easements to the Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 which govern a series of short-term respite care placements. The easements address the frequency of reviews, the timing of the first visit, and the number of placement days allowed in any 12 month period.

The safeguards review of children living away from home stresses the importance of care planning and review and emphasises the particular vulnerability of disabled children. The Government have established a Ministerial Task Force to consider issues raised by the report and will take account of current research on related areas.

The Department has received the following research studies relevant to care plans and reviews for disabled children:

Robinson, C., Weston C. and Minkes J. (1995) Making progress: change and development in services to disabled children under the Children Act 1989, Bristol, Nora Fry Research Centre;

Grimshaw, R. and Sinclair, R. (1997) Planning to Care: Regulation, procedures and practice under the Children Act 1989, London, National Children's Bureau;

Morris, J. (1998) Still Missing?, London, Who Cares? Trust.

New Variant CJD

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if all the victims of nv-CJD have the same genetic change in the prion protein. [37871]

Ms Jowell: In all cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (nvCJD) where a genetic analysis has been carried out, the prion protein gene has the same genetic make-up. The significance of the genetic make-up in relation to susceptibility to disease, to the length of incubation period or to the changes seen in the brain on histopathological examination is not yet known.

All nvCJD cases tested share the same protein-subtype. It is not known whether this is related to the genetic make-up of the person affected. It may be related to the strain of the infectious agent.

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the new appointees to the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust, giving their *(a)* political affiliation and *(b)* remuneration. [38099]

Mr. Milburn: The names of the chairman and non-executive appointees to the Northumbria Healthcare National Health Service Trust will be announced shortly.

Non-executive directors of NHS trusts and health authorities are entitled to remuneration of £5,000 a year. The chairman of Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust is entitled to £19,245 a year.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who were the members of the Northumbria NHS Trust Project Board when it chose the name which it is proposed should be used by the new trust. [38315]

Mr. Milburn: The Northumbria National Health Service Trust Project Board comprised the chairmen, chief executives and medical directors of the three merging trusts: Cheviot and Wansbeck NHS Trust, North Tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust and Northumberland Community Health NHS Trust.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the system of hospital consultants' merit bonus awards; and if he will make a statement. [38089]

Mr. Milburn: I met the chairman and medical director of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards (ACDA) on 2 April. We had a constructive and wide ranging discussion regarding the Government's concerns about imbalances in the distribution of awards and other aspects of the existing scheme. I welcomed the action that had been taken to date to address these imbalances and ACDA's commitment to continued action in this area. We discussed what more could be done to address the Government's concerns. The chairman and medical director agreed to submit their detailed proposals on further action to ensure fairness, greater transparency of process, and better recognition of the achievement of service goals. I also asked the chairman and medical director to consider whether any changes in the size and composition of ACDA might be necessary to make it more effective, and to discuss this with the Academy of Royal Colleges in the first instance. We will consult fully with representatives of the professions and other relevant interests before any decisions on changes to the existing scheme are taken, with a view to implementing any such changes in the 1999 awards round.

Cholesterol (Treatment)

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), of 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *49–50*, on cholesterol treatment, what estimate he has made of the additional cost of general practitioners following the instructions contained in the executive letter on lipid-limiting drugs and the health care bulletin. [36792]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The overall expenditure on the statins group of drugs by general practitioners in 1997 was £115 million, compared with £20 million in 1993. It is currently rising at the rate of approximately £3 million each quarter. Expenditure on all lipid-lowering drugs totalled some £136 million in 1997.

The Executive Letter, accompanying statement and table gave advice, inter alia, on the use of the statin group of drugs in people with, or at high risk of developing, symptoms of coronary heart disease. Estimates of the additional general practitioner prescribing costs resulting directly from the issue of the Executive Letter are not available as it is difficult to differentiate between these and increased costs which would have been incurred anyway as more trial results became available and were published in the professional press.

However, the best information available suggests that the total cost could reach £240 million by 2002. This estimate depends on the degree of patient compliance, as well as on the particular product which is prescribed and the dosage. It also depends on the outcome of further trials currently in progress which may affect the applications for which these drugs may be used. This figure excludes lipid-lowering drugs prescribed by doctors other than general practitioners.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Sales

16. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish his revised proposals for an EU code of conduct on arms sales. [36548]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are engaged in negotiations with EU partners on a draft text. Holding these discussions in public would not improve our chances of reaching agreement on an effective Code. We will of course publish the Code once it has been adopted.

Ethical Foreign Policy

17. **Mr. Letwin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what systems of measurement he has introduced against which to assess the implementation of his ethical foreign policy. [36549]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Our commitment to an ethical foreign policy is clear from the many things we have already achieved. The best system of measurement comes from transparency and accountability. We have therefore committed our performance to the scrutiny of public, Parliament and NGOs with an Annual Report on Human Rights.

23. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part the Government's ethical foreign policy has played in the Strategic Defence Review. [36556]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As the Government made clear in their manifesto, the Strategic Defence Review is foreign policy led. The FCO Mission Statement made it clear that the security of the United Kingdom and its Dependent Territories was a principal benefit which the Government would pursue through their foreign policy and that an ethical content was a key part of that policy.

Syria

18. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Syria. [36550]

Mr. Robin Cook: I had useful discussions on regional issues with President Asad and Foreign Minister Shara'a. We agreed on the need for movement on all tracks of the Middle East Peace Process.

Iraq

20. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to meet his United States counterparts to discuss matters relating to the Basra enclave. [36553]

Mr. Fatchett: We keep in constant touch with all Security Council Members, including the United States, about the implementation of Security Council Resolutions.

Exports

21. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote British exports. [36554]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams).

Indonesia

22. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK relations with Indonesia. [36555]

Mr. Fatchett: We have a bilateral relationship with Indonesia which enables us to discuss a range of economic and political issues.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding the situations of Pius Lustrilanang and Desmond J. Mahesa in Indonesia. [37503]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received a letter from the Indonesian Human Rights Campaign (TAPOL) and three notes from Amnesty International about Pius Lustrilanang and Desmond J. Mahesa.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

24. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goals remain to be attained in the area of the EU CFSP under the British presidency. [36557]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Making the Common Foreign and Security Policy more effective and operational remains a key Presidency objective. Under our Presidency lead, the EU has responded rapidly to crises, including in Algeria and Kosovo; has agreed balanced policies on China and Iran; and raised the EU's profile and input into the Middle East Peace Process. Important outstanding goals include agreement to an EU Code of Conduct on arms exports.

Middle East

25. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the EU has contributed to support the middle east peace process since 1993. [36558]

Mr. Fatchett: The EU has contributed £464 million (700.95 million ecu) to support the Middle East Peace Process since 1993. In addition, Member States have also contributed a substantial amount of bilateral aid.

Under the UK Presidency, the EU has agreed to extend the current aid package when it expires at the end of 1998.

29. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for progress in the peace process in the middle east. [36562]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson).

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on recent efforts to promote the peace process in the middle east. [36567]

Mr. Fatchett: During my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit to the Middle East on 15–18 March, he met with the key players in the region. These included President Mubarak and Foreign Minister Moussa of Egypt, PM Netanyahu and Defence Minister Mordechai of Israel, Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan, PM Hariri and Foreign Minister Bouaz of Lebanon, President Assad and Foreign Minister Shara of Syria and President Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. He discussed with them ideas for ways in which the EU can play a more prominent role in reinvigorating the Middle East Peace Process.

Since his return, he has met a number of interested parties, including the Israeli Ambassador to London and the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. We look forward to the Prime Minister's visit later this month.

Kosovo

26. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the situation in Kosovo. [36559]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are deeply concerned by the potential for further violence in Kosovo. The use of excessive force by the Serbian police in recent weeks against Kosovar Albanians will have widened support for the terrorists. We call on President Milosevic to act quickly to launch the meaningful dialogue necessary to strengthen the hands of moderates on both sides.

27. **Mr. Lock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of Albania and Macedonia about the situation in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [36560]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary chaired a meeting in Bonn on 25 March of Contact Group, EU Troika and regional countries including Albania and Macedonia, at which the situation in Kosovo was discussed. My right hon. Friend also had a separate bilateral meeting on this occasion with Prime Minister Nano. We remain in close touch with Albania and Macedonia.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take to protect the Albanian community in Kosovo. [38182]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom has played a leading role in the concerted international response to the violence in Kosovo in recent weeks. We shall continue to work with our international partners to underline that repression in Kosovo will not be tolerated and to encourage meaningful dialogue without preconditions on the future status of the province.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the consequences of the decision of the Contact Group

to postpone the implementation of the recommendations set out in its statement of 9 March; and if he will make a statement. [38183]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Members of the Contact Group have already implemented measures against Belgrade in accordance with their agreement in London on 9 March. In addition the European Union decided on 19 March to continue its arms embargo against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), not to supply repressive equipment, to introduce a visa ban against certain named individuals and to apply a moratorium on export credits to Serbia. The United Nations Security Council adopted a comprehensive arms embargo against the FRY on 31 March.

Contact Group Ministers meeting in Bonn on 25 March urged Belgrade to engage in a meaningful dialogue without preconditions with the Kosovar Albanian leadership. They agreed that the Contact Group would meet again after four weeks to review progress and consider the need for additional measures.

Common Agricultural Policy

28. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make reform of the CAP his priority for the Heads of Government meeting in Cardiff in June. [36561]

Mr. Doug Henderson: CAP reform is a major priority for the Government, and we will continue to work hard to achieve radical reform. Now that the Commission has tabled draft regulations, the UK Presidency will seek to make as much progress as possible before Cardiff.

Nigeria

30. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the Nigerian Government to hand over to civilian rule by October this year. [36565]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), and assure the House that we take every opportunity to reiterate our concerns to the Nigerian regime.

Baltic States

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to improve relations between the United Kingdom and the Baltic states. [36532]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have good bilateral relations with the Baltic States. We shall continue to work to strengthen trade, security and cultural links and to help these countries meet the criteria required for membership of the European Union.

Revolving Credit Fund

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the UN Revolving Credit Fund, proposed by the Secretary General of the United Nations, as part of his UN reform proposals. [33302]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 11 March 1998]:* A Revolving Credit Fund could help to ease the UN's severe cashflow problems, and the Government will consider the idea carefully. But a long term solution requires that all member states pay their contributions promptly and in full.

EU Funds

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those European Communities budget lines from which funding may be applied for in respect of information projects in the United Kingdom relating to *(a)* Economic and Monetary Union and *(b)* the European Communities. [36956]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Title B3–3 of the Community Budget covers information and communication. The Commission also makes grants to certain European organisations under Chapter A-30 of the budget, which may include support for information activities.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what grants, pursuant to European Communities budget lines A-3024 and A-3104, are available for Projects Organised By Associations and Federations of European Interest operating in the United Kingdom; which bodies received awards in the last financial year; what activities are intended for targeted support under the category Reflection at European Level on the Ethical and Spiritual Foundations of European Integration; what part his Department plays in the awards; and if he will make a statement. [36948]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In 1998 a total of 1.35 mecu is available under Community budget lines A-3024 and A-3104 for projects organised by federations of European interest. This budget is not broken down by Member State. Criteria and decisions on awarding grants are a matter for the Commission.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what activities are undertaken by the Our Europe Association listed in the European Communities budget, lines A-3020 and A-3100; what is that body's remit in the United Kingdom; what role his Department plays in determining its remit; and if he will make a statement. [36888]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Our Europe association is a study and research group which sponsors and organises seminars on European issues. My Department has no role in determining its remit, which is Europe-wide.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to European Communities budget lines A-3029 and A-3109, what grants are available for support of non-Governmental youth organisations; what criteria govern qualification; which bodies in the United Kingdom received awards over the last financial year; what input his Department provided on their selection; and if he will make a statement. [36969]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In 1998 a total of 1.1 mecu is available under the Community budget lines A-3029 and A-3109 to support international non-governmental youth organisations. This budget is specifically for international

bodies and is not broken down by Member State. Criteria and decisions on awarding grants are a matter for the Commission.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to European Communities budget lines A-3037 and A-3117, what grants are available for the European Women's Lobby; what is the purpose of that organisation; what role his Department plays in the determination of direction of funding; and if he will make a statement. [36949]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In 1998 a total of 600,000 ecu is available under Community budget lines A-3037 and A-3117 to support the European Women's Lobby, an organisation which lobbies on issues of concern to women in Europe. How this money is directed is a matter for the Commission.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to European Communities budget lines A-3025 and A-3105, what grants are available for the project Journalists in Europe; what is the purpose of that organisation; what input his Department has into its running; how many journalists from the United Kingdom have taken part over the past financial year; for which newspapers they work; and if he will make a statement. [36970]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In 1998 a total of 250,000 ecu is available under Community budget lines A-3025 and A-3105 to support Journalists in Europe. This organisation runs an annual training programme for young journalists from around the world, focusing on the EU and on political, economic and social developments in Europe. My Department has no role in determining the activities of this organisation and we have no information about which UK journalists have taken part.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the purpose of projects undertaken under European Communities budget line B3–302, Information Programmes for Non-Member Programmes; what are the target audiences; which countries are concerned; and what input his Department provides. [36965]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Projects under Community budget line B3–302 are intended to inform people outside of the EU about the Union's work and to promote understanding of the EU's role, in particular, as a provider of aid and as a trading partner. Information activity is not limited to any particular countries, but there is a focus on states which have association agreements with the EU. Programmes under this budget line are run by the Commission.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what grants, pursuant to European Communities budget lines A-3021 and A-3101, are available to Organisations Advancing the Idea of Europe operating in the United Kingdom; which bodies received awards in the last financial year; and what criteria are used by his Department in awarding grants. [36974]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In 1998 a total of 2 mecu is available under Community budget lines A-3021 and A-3101 to support organisations advancing the idea of Europe. This budget is not broken down by Member State. Criteria and decisions on awarding grants are a matter for the Commission.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the information outlets in receipt of funds in the United Kingdom for 1997 under European Communities title B3–301 for 1997; what role his Department plays in the supply of information to such outlets; and if he will make a statement on the purpose of the International Federation of Europe Houses. [36961]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The following information outlets in the UK receive funding from Community budget line B3--301. European Document centres in university libraries (45); European Information Centres providing business intelligence on operating in the EU (21); rural carrefours providing information for the rural community (6). The information held in these various centres generally includes UK Government publications, as well as EU documents and academic and commercial literature and databases.

The International Federation of Europe Houses is an umbrella grouping of Europe Houses, which provide a one-stop-shop for information about the EU in some countries.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects in receipt of funds in the United Kingdom for 1997 under title B3–300, General Information and Communication Work Concerning the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the part his Department plays in the determination of such. [36966]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Community budget line B3–300 covers a range of information measures including opinion polling, impact assessments, sponsored visits, publications, TV productions and internet sites. This budget is not broken down by Member State.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what activities are undertaken by the European Union Youth Forum under European Communities, Budget lines A-3022 and A-3103; what is that body's remit in the United Kingdom; what role his Department plays in determining its remit; and if he will make a statement. [36940]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The European Youth Forum is an umbrella grouping of national youth organisations. It lobbies on EU issues affecting young people and organises various conferences and events. My Department has no role in determining the Forum's activities.

Prince Programme

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the redirection of the Prince Programme after ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam. [36955]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The PRINCE programme currently provides for information activities on citizens rights under the single market, on the single currency and on the future shape of the European Union—"Building Europe Together". Building Europe Together is currently focused on the Amsterdam Treaty, but it also covers

information on the future enlargement of the EU. The existence and priorities of PRINCE are reviewed every year under the annual budgetary procedure.

EU Information Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money is available from European Union budget lines for information projects on the European Union in applicant countries; and if he will deposit in the Library a list of those projects in operation. [37559]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Essen European Council of December 1994 agreed on the

"need among member states of the EU and the associated countries to have a better knowledge of each others' societies. Therefore expansion and deepening of information efforts are necessary."

Much of this work forms an integral part of the European Union's technical assistance programme for Central Europe (Phare).

In addition to these integrated activities, there is also a specific programme for 1998 of 6.6 mecu for an information strategy among the applicant countries. This is designed to stimulate greater interest and understanding of EU affairs among the general public in these countries.

European Commission

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the (i) role and (ii) current budget of a European commissioner's cabinet; what guidelines exist as to its composition and function; and if he will list the special advisers currently working in the Commission. [37770]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member in due course. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

European Voluntary Service (Mr. Hans Koschnick)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of Mr. Hans Koschnick, as a special adviser to the European Commission in connection with the European Voluntary Service. [37932]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My answer to the hon. Member of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *457*, based on information from the European Commission, recorded that Mr. Hans Koschnick was not employed by them. However, I now understand from the European Commission that, although Mr. Koschnick is not their permanent employee, he has been working under contract as an adviser to DG XXII (Education, Training, Youth) with activities in the field of the European Voluntary Service.

We understand that his remit includes developing voluntary service projects and establishing links between voluntary service organisations in different Member States.

We recommend that the hon. Member ask the European Commission if he requires further details of Mr. Koschnick's role.

Turkey

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Turkish Government; and if he will make a statement. [36533]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe).

WALES

Social Service and Health Departments (Co-operation)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his assessment of the quality of co-operation between social service departments and health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [36459]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Evidence available to the Welsh Office suggests that following Local Government re-organisation good progress is being made in establishing effective joint working between Social Service Departments and Health Authorities.

I attach the greatest importance to good joint working and, indeed, discussed this with representatives of the Welsh Local Government Association on 16 March. My officials are working closely with colleagues in other Health Departments on initiatives to tackle this UK-wide issue and are also taking forward action with authorities in Wales.

The Welsh Office is funding a project through the North Wales Health Authority to identify good practice in collaborative working with social services departments. The report of this work will be made available for wider dissemination. In October 1997 I announced an additional £9.548 million to tackle the pressures of emergency hospital admissions and to reduce delays in discharging patients. The management of these additional resources has meant that health authorities and social services have needed to work more closely together to address local priorities and improve joint planning and co-ordination of service delivery.

In the light of the Audit Commission report "Coming of Age" the Welsh Office has recently issued advice to health and local authorities, seeking better collaboration at a local level to improve the quality and range of services provided for vulnerable and older people. This will be followed up by meetings with joint Health and Local Authority teams on the progress being made in implementing the report's recommendations.

I expect authorities to work towards effective joint planning arrangements which will include improvement in multi-disciplinary assessment procedures and the development of health and social care services to enable vulnerable people to optimise their independence through timely recuperation and rehabilitation opportunities.

Out-of-town Developments

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce an automatic rate review for town centre shops whose trade is affected by out of town developments. [37024]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Ratepayers have the right to make a proposal to the valuation officer to alter the rateable value of their property if there has been a material change in circumstances which they believe affects the value of the property. Local authorities can also make proposals to take account of changes they believe to affect property values.

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many out-of-town supermarkets have been given planning permission in Wales since 1 May 1997. [37031]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is not held centrally. However, during the period 1 May 1997 to 1 March 1998 my right hon. Friend received details of 18 retail applications comprising 9 calls in requests, 2 departure references, and 7 shopping direction referrals. Of these 1 case was called in for the Secretary of State's own determination.

Children in Care

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many complaints have been registered by children in care regarding the way that they are treated, in the last three years. [37056]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on the number of complaints prior to local government reorganisation is not available. However, we are aware of 55 complaints since 1 April 1996. A breakdown is as follows:

Local Authority	*Number of complaints since 1 April 1996*
Anglesey	0
Blaenau Gwent	0
Bridgend	[1]
Caerphilly	2
Cardiff	3
Carmarthenshire	1
Ceredigion	[1]
Conwy	0
Denbighshire	1
Flintshire	5
Gwynedd	10
Merthyr Tydfil	1
Monmouthshire	0
Neath Port Talbot	1
Newport	7
Pembrokeshire	1
Powys	1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	3
Swansea	3
Torfaen	0
Vale of Glamorgan	10
Wrexham	6

[1] Information currently not available

Substance Misuse

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives are being pursued to educate young people in Wales about substance misuse. [37370]

Mr. Win Griffiths: "Forward Together", a five-year strategy to combat drug and alcohol misuse in Wales, has been in place since 1996. A Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse advises the Secretary of State on the implementation of the strategy. The Welsh Drug and Alcohol Unit, on contract to the Welsh Office, assists in the implementation of the strategy. The Unit provides practical and administrative support to those involved in combating drug and alcohol misuse.

Within the framework of "Forward Together", a Strategic Prevention Action Plan (SPAP) has been developed and widely disseminated in Wales. The SPAP will raise awareness and increase the level of preventive action for the population as a whole as well as targeting specific groups such as parents, young people and children. All schools, drug and alcohol agencies and other relevant organisations have been encouraged to work to support the Plan.

As part of the overall strategy several free bilingual resources are being distributed to those working in the field of prevention with young people. These include "50/50"—a bilingual magazine designed for young people and their parents; "The A Files"—a CD size alcohol leaflet for young people; and "Let's Talk"—a series of collectable postcards with a complimentary poster for young people.

The Department has issued circular guidance to Schools, "Drug Misuse: Prevention and Schools" (Ref 54/95). In partnership with health and social services, police and the community, schools have a responsibility to consider their response to drug misuse through appropriate education, including the teaching of certain aspects as part of National Curriculum, and through appropriate management of incidents on school premises. In support of this work, the circular guidance advocates that each school should have a drug prevention policy, to ensure that young people know and understand the risks of drug taking and alcohol misuse and have the knowledge and skills to resist.

Hospital Services (Porthmadog)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the health care implications for people in the Porthmadog area of the provision at Bangor of accident and emergency services for them. [37677]

Mr. Win Griffiths: None. The planning of healthcare for people in North Wales is a management issue for the North Wales Health Authority and its provider units.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he estimates construction of the community hospital at Porthmadog will *(a)* begin and *(b)* be completed. [37598]

Mr. Win Griffiths: No progress can be made on this scheme until the North Wales Health Authority has considered the outcome of its review of community hospital provision.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in respect of the construction of the new community hospital in Porthmadog. [37602]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Since 1 May 1997 we have received 12 letters on the subject and I have met with the right hon. Member and the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd).

Welsh Language Courses

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to reduce the drop-out rate among adults on Welsh language courses. [37600]

Mr. Ron Davies: Welsh language provision is an integral part of my proposals for lifelong learning in Wales as set out in the Green Paper *"Learning is for Everyone"* which I published on 2 April. Individual further education institutions are responsible for monitoring student retention/completion rates on Welsh for Adults courses and for taking any necessary action. Student retention/completion will continue to be monitored in the context of all quality assessments, and during 1998 a specific study will be undertaken by OHMCI on behalf of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new community hospitals have been built in Wales since 1992; and if he will list them. [37675]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Six community hospitals have been built since 1992. They are:

Barry Neighbourhood—The Vale of Glamorgan

Cefni—Llangefni, Isle of Anglesey

Deeside—Flintshire

Ebbw Vale—Blaenau Gwent

Torfaen—Pontypool

Penrhos Stanley—Holyhead, Isle of Anglesey.

Blood Donation Service

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to encourage blood donation in Wales. [37601]

Mr. Win Griffiths: It is the responsibility of the blood transfusion services to recruit blood donors. However, the Welsh Office has assisted the Welsh Blood Service in the production of publicity material and previously taken part in national publicity campaigns.

Water Authorities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has met representatives of water authorities; and if he will make a statement. [38130]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Both my right hon. Friend and I have met representatives of the water industry in Wales on several occasions and will continue to do so as appropriate.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the new National Health Service trusts to begin their work; and if he will make a statement. [38290]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Project teams have been established to support local consultation on the proposals which I announced on 30 March. These teams will also do whatever is necessary to make contingent planning arrangements for the establishment of the new trusts. Subject to the outcome of consultation and detailed consideration, my right hon. Friend expects to announce his final decisions in the autumn. Board level appointments procedures and detailed planning will then commence to enable trusts to become operational on 1 April 1999.

Badgers

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what records are maintained of the number of non-target species caught in snares set for badgers under his Department's tuberculosis control scheme. [38056]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The tuberculosis control policy for Great Britain is operated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister responsible for food safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *406*.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost of the proposed badger culling experiment broken down to show each constituent element for *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* each subsequent year of the proposed experiment. [38055]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister responsible for food safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *406*.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many badgers were trapped under his Department's tuberculosis control scheme in each year since 1985 by *(a)* snares and *(b)* cage traps; and if he will indicate the number of animals which suffered injuries in *(a)* and *(b)*. [38057]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The day to day operational control for bovine tuberculosis is undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister responsible for food safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *503*.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department has spent on developing vaccines to prevent bovine tuberculosis since 1985; and how much investment is planned for each of the next five years. [38054]

Mr. Win Griffiths: None. In the UK funding for the development of vaccines to prevent bovine tuberculosis in animals is provided by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister responsible for food safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), on 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *502*.

Hospital Beds

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by hospital the number of beds *(a)* made available since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* removed between 1 January 1992 and 1 May 1997. [38069]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Abattoirs

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on financial support to small scale abattoirs in rural Wales. [38077]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The provision of grant aid to abattoirs is prohibited by EC State Aid restrictions except under certain specific conditions, including the abandonment of 125 per cent. of existing capacity in the same region. This effectively means that it is very difficult for the Government to provide financial support to small scale abattoirs in rural areas.

Officials (Regional Knowledge)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to encourage Welsh Office officials *(a)* to visit and *(b)* to acquire further knowledge of the regions of Wales. [38079]

Mr. Ron Davies: Many of my officials visit various parts of Wales in the course of their duties and are encouraged to do so. Staff are based not only in Cardiff but in Llandrindod Wells, Carmarthen, Caernarfon, Colwyn Bay and Aberystwyth.

Awareness of Wales and Welsh issues will form an increasingly important part of the Welsh Office Training and Development Programme.

Agricultural Subsidies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce measures to offset the reduction in payments in agricultural subsidies due to the increase in the value of the green pound. [37880]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The rules for agrimonetary compensation apply across the European Community and separate arrangements could not be introduced in Wales.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he is going to consult about possible changes to the local government capital finance arrangements in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38436]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Copies of a consultation paper on local authority capital have been placed in the Library of the House today. This is the third consultation paper in the series "Modernising Local Government in Wales". Consultation papers on other aspects of the local government finance system and the new ethical framework will follow soon.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many health authorities have an osteoporosis strategy in place; and if he will list them. [37308]

Mr. Win Griffiths *[pursuant to his reply, 6 April 1998, c. 104]*: I regret that the following paragraph was inadvertently omitted from the answer, and should have read:

Typically these are based on the Barlow Report 1994 which contained wide ranging recommendations on such key issues as prevention, scanning, hormone replacement therapy and improved co-operation between the professionals delivering the service.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. Timms: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 31 March; and if he will make a statement. [37595]

Dr. John Cunningham: I chaired the fourth meeting under the United Kingdom Presidency of the European Union Council of Agriculture Ministers on 31 March in Brussels. My noble Friend the Lord Donoughue, Parliamentary Secretary responsible for the farming and food industry, represented the United Kingdom. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), was also present.

I convened the Council expressly to consider the Commission's proposals, published on 18 March, for changes to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the framework of Agenda 2000. The Council debate on this vital issue was held in open session, and was thus available in full to the media and to other interested parties. There was also an important political dimension to the debate: reforming the CAP in tandem with changes to the EU's future financing provisions and to its regional and structural policies are essential steps to prepare for further enlargement of the European Union. It is significant that the formal opening of the enlargement negotiations with six applicant countries took place in Brussels on the same day.

A wide range of views on the Commission's CAP reform proposals was expressed in the Council. No Minister denied that there was a need for reform to take place, or that the process should begin forthwith. I was able to conclude that the UK Presidency would now begin an intensive programme of technical examination of the Commission's proposals, leading to a further discussion in the Agriculture Council in late May.

I was also able to establish, as President of the Council, that there was unanimous agreement amongst Member States to defer until 1 January 1999 implementation of last July's Commission Decision on Specified Risk Materials. During this period measures taken by Member States on a national basis to protect the health of their populations will be maintained.

Over-thirty-months Scheme

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the latest

figures for *(a)* the number of cattle slaughtered under the over 30-months-scheme, *(b)* the amount of brown granular dust produced by the rendering of those cattle, *(c)* the number of carcases incinerated without rendering and *(d)* the amount of meat and bone meal awaiting incineration at the latest available date. [37571]

Mr. Rooker: Up to 29 March 1998, just under 2.2 million animals had been slaughtered under the Over-Thirty-Month Scheme (OTMS), of which some 128,000 were directly incinerated. The majority of cattle presented for the scheme are being rendered to produce two products, meat and bone meal (MBM) and tallow, which are being safely and securely stored pending destruction. To date, some 325,000 tonnes of MBM has been produced as a consequence of the rendering of OTMS animals, of which some 314,000 tonnes is currently in store, the remainder having been incinerated.

Organophosphates

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commenced and *(b)* evaluated on the number of farmers who have contracted illness as a result of exposure to organophosphate pesticides. [38230]

Mr. Rooker: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Pesticide Incidents Appraisal Panel (PIAP) considers all investigated incidents where the use of a pesticide (controlled under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986) may have affected the health of the user or a member of the public nearby. The Panel is chaired by a doctor, its members being drawn from the HSE, the Department of Health, and the National Poisons Information Service.

PIAP assesses all information from investigations by HSE and local authorities, with any additional material from the National Health Service or others involved. The incidents are classified according to the likelihood of the ill-health being linked to the pesticide exposure and an annual report is published.

The Suspected Adverse Reaction Surveillance Scheme (SARSS) is a voluntary reporting scheme for monitoring animal and human suspected adverse reactions (SARs) to all veterinary medicinal products. Farmers, doctors, veterinary surgeons and members of the public are encouraged to report any SAR involving a veterinary medicine to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). Marketing authorisation holders are required to send reports of SARs to the VMD. Human SARs are considered by the Appraisal Panel for Human Suspected Adverse Reactions to Veterinary Medicines and reported to the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC). The reports of the Appraisal Panel are published and copies are available in the Library of the House.

Bilderberg Group

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the influence of the Bilderberg group on world agricultural prices. [37924]

Mr. Rooker: No such representations have been received.

Canadian Pedigree Friesians

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his policy to allow meat from Canadian pedigree friesians into the United Kingdom food chain. [38065]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Provided the meat originates from approved establishments in Canada, is accompanied by the necessary official certification and is not rejected following completion of veterinary checks at a border inspection post, meat from Canadian pedigree fresians, and other bovine animals, will be allowed to enter the European Community. The sale of beef for human consumption from animals originating in Canada which are over 30 months old at the time of slaughter is, however, prohibited by the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations 1996.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for the Central Science Laboratory sites at *(a)* Sand Hutton, York and *(b)* Colney Lane, Norwich the proportion of Central Science Laboratory work and income generated in 1997–98 from *(a)* research and development, *(b)* policy advice and surveillance and *(c)* technical support. [37946]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am however able to provide the following analysis:

£ million

	CSL York	*CSL Norwich*	*Total*
MAFF R&D	9.8	2.6	12.4
Other MAFF	7.0	2.4	9.4
Commercial	2.4	1.4	3.8
Total	19.2	6.4	25.6

These figures are subject to financial year end reconciliation.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *504*, what assumptions his Department has made of the redundancy costs for staff in non-mobile grades currently employed by the Central Science Laboratory in Norwich, if the Norwich laboratory were to be closed. [37987]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* In the previous relocation exercise, to initially occupy the Sand Hutton site, the Central Science Laboratory was successful in the redeployment of non-mobile staff at the various sites vacated. In the event of a decision to relocate the work undertaken at the Norwich laboratory to York every effort will be made to redeploy those non-mobile staff not relocating and it is not anticipated that there would be significant compulsory redundancies.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average cost of redundancy of a Central Science Laboratory, Norwich employee in a non-mobile grade; and by whom that cost will be borne. [37952]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* In the previous relocation exercise, to initially occupy the Sand Hutton site, the Central Science Laboratory was successful in assisting non-mobile staff to secure employment elsewhere. On this basis it is not envisaged that there would be significant compulsory redundancies should the decision be made to relocate the work undertaken at the Norwich laboratory to York. However, the average cost of redundancy for a non-mobile employee based at CSL Norwich would be £5,500 and such costs would be borne by the Department.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *597*, if he will list for the Central Science Laboratory sites at *(a)* Sand Hutton, York and *(b)* Colney Lane, Norwich the total office and laboratory floor area which his Department considers not capable of practical use. [37984]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The total area of a building is usually assessed as the "Gross Internal Area". The usable space within a building is normally assessed as the "Net Internal Area". The former is a measurement of each floor plate whereas the latter is a measurement which excludes such areas as plant rooms, toilets, stairwells, corridors, internal structural walls and columns, and some other related service facilities.

The estimated Gross Internal Area of laboratories and offices at the Central Science Laboratory in York is 26,500 square metres. The estimated Net Internal Area is 18,400 square metres. The usable space figure of 15,600 square metres given in my answer of 3 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *597*, was the estimated Net Internal Area of laboratories and offices less some 2,800 square metres of additional very specialist facilities.

An estimate of the Gross Internal Area of laboratories and offices at Colney Lane, Norwich is not available and obtaining one would involve disproportionate cost. However, the estimated Gross Internal Area for the whole Colney Lane site is 5,000 square metres. The figure of 2,200 square metres given in my answer of 3 March was the estimated Net Internal Area of laboratories and offices.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons his Department did not accept the view of the Prior Options Review, and the study by independent consultants, as set out by his Department on 9 December 1996, that consolidation of the Central Science Laboratory in York was likely to lead to *(a)* a breaking of beneficial scientific links with the Institute of Food Research and *(b)* a loss of business previously based at Central Science Laboratory, Norwich. [37945]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Central Science Laboratory collaborates with institutes and universities in this country and within the EU. This demonstrates that geographical proximity is not a necessary requirement for productive collaboration.

Previous experience has shown that the impact on income from MAFF customers, the wider public sector and the private sector, as a result of relocation, is minimal in the short term. In the longer term benefits have been realised from an increase in the customer base.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the net cash allocation initially agreed by his Department for the Central Science Laboratory for 1997–98 together with the final outcome cash allocation. [37941]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The net cash allocation originally agreed for 1997–98 for the Central Science Laboratory was £1.526m. This figure is subject to amendment throughout the year with approval from the MAFF Management Board. Financial year end reconciliation is presently in progress and the final outcome is not yet available.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* current and *(b)* anticipated private sector tenants of the Central Science Laboratory at Sand Hutton, York, together with the annual rent payable. [37947]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* There are no current leases but a lease is presently being negotiated with the Centre for Biomedical Accelerator Mass Spectrometry for occupation of a small part of the Sand Hutton site. There are no immediate plans to lease accommodation to other private sector tenants.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *728*, what estimates he has made of the average downtime for scientific staff relocated from Norwich to York, including time spent decommissioning, moving and recommissioning equipment. [38151]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* I have no reason to believe that the estimated down time would differ significantly from previous experience detailed in the answer to which my hon. Friend refers. The earlier major relocation to the new Central Science Laboratory site near York included the relocation of sophisticated analytical chemistry equipment similar to that at Norwich. The average down time for that relocation exercise was three weeks for each scientific team.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff, and how many scientists, were employed by the Central Science Laboratory at Torry, Aberdeen, in January 1995. [37767]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* A total of 108 staff were employed by the Central Science Laboratory at Torry in January 1995. Of these, 67 were scientists.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *188*, on the Central Science Laboratory, how many non fee-earning scientists are employed by the Central Science Laboratory at *(a)* Sand Hutton, York and *(b)* Colney Lane, Norwich. [37827]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* There are 28 non fee-earning scientists employed at the CSL York laboratory and 2 at the Norwich laboratory. These staff are employed in management roles and support functions.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *656*, if he will set out the reasons

for his Department's commitment of £170,000 of research resources to the York Laboratory of the CSL in 1998–99; and for the absence of any commitment for similar research to *(a)* York in 1997–98 and *(b)* Norwich in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99. [38382]

Mr. Rooker: £170,000 was committed to CSL York as an interim arrangement following the relocation of the Microbiology Group from the Torry Research Station, Aberdeen. The purpose was to ensure continuing expertise at CSL York, delivering work of value to the Ministry, whilst CSL York secured additional sources of external funding. No such commitment was sought by York in 1997–98, or Norwich in 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Food Science Research

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the food science research contracts allocated by his Department in 1997–98, broken down by length of contract, value of contract and institution securing the contract. [37965]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The very extensive list of the food science research contracts allocated by the Department in 1997–98, broken down by length of contract, value of contract and institution securing the contract, has been placed in the Library of the House.

BSE (Compensation)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *499*, what was the total amount of compensation paid in relation to BSE in the last five financial years; and if he will provide a breakdown of compensation payments by each sector of the food industry. [37681]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*[1]1997–98*
Payments to producers	37	20	10	904	439
Aid to slaughter sector	0	0	0	82	0
Aid to renderers	0	0	0	87	65
Aid to hide industry	0	0	0	4	0
Total	37	20	10	1,077	504

[1] Provisional.

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reasons advanced by the UK's EU partners for the maintenance of intervention in discussions on the Common Agricultural Policy. [37594]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* In discussions on the original Agenda 2000 proposals, the Agriculture Council agreed in November last year that maintaining the status quo in the CAP could lead to an increase in intervention stocks. In view of this, the Council called upon the European Commission to frame formal legislative proposals which would, amongst other things, reduce price-support measures. This would reduce the importance of intervention as a management tool, which is its main purpose.

The Commission's proposals for reform, which were presented to the Agriculture Council on 31 March, included cuts in the beef, cereal and dairy support prices and the abolition of intervention for the beef sector. While accepting the need for reduced price support, some Member States have argued that, without full compensation, some of these price reductions go too far.

Kali Mountford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations his Department has made to the European Commission concerning reform of the CAP and the structural funds. [36566]

Mr. Rooker: Proposals for the reform of the CAP were presented to the Agriculture Council by the European Commission on 31 March. The Government will progress discussion of these proposals as far as possible during the UK Presidency and will seek to negotiate an outcome which reflects UK priorities. The same applies to reform of the structural funds.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy; and if he will make a statement. [38313]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission presented its formal legislative proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to the Agriculture Council on 31 March. In most respects, these proposals go very much in the direction that the Government have advocated. The Government will progress discussion of these proposals as far as possible during the UK Presidency and will thereafter seek to negotiate an outcome which reflects UK priorities.

Pig Farming

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on the competitiveness of UK pig farming in Europe of the UK ban on farrowing crates. [37575]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* None, the use of farrowing crates is not banned in the UK. Sow stalls and tethers will be banned in the UK from 1 January 1999. While no assessment has been made of the impact of this ban, it does present the UK pig sector with marketing opportunities emphasising high welfare standards.

Sheep Dips

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice his Department gives farmers on the disposal of sheep dip, with particular reference to that containing organophosphates. [38341]

Mr. Rooker: Advice is given in the *Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water* and the "Sheep Dipping" leaflet, AS29, copies of both of which are in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which other EU countries dipping sheep for the treatment or prevention of scab is compulsory. [37844]

Mr. Rooker: The information available to the Department is that no other EU member state makes it compulsory to dip sheep for the prevention of scab. It is understood that some Member States require infested sheep to be treated but not necessarily by dipping.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when *(a)* Australia, *(b)* New Zealand and *(c)* the United States made the dipping of sheep for the prevention of scab compulsory. [37845]

Mr. Rooker: It is understood that there is no sheep scab in Australia, New Zealand or the United States and consequently no need for compulsory treatment, whether or not by dipping.

DEFENCE

US Visiting Forces

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the total number of US Visiting Forces based in the UK; and where they are located; [31917]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *490*, how many of his Department's personnel are based at (i) Abbey Wood, (ii) RAF Alconbury, Molesworth and Upwood, (iii) RAF Bentley Priory, (iv) Boscombe Down, (v) RAF Bracknell, (vi) RAF Brampton, (vii) RAF Brize Norton, (viii) RAF Coltishall, (ix) RAF Cranwell, (x) RAF Croughton, (xi) RAF Digby, (xii) RAF Daws Hill, Hythe and West Ruislip, (xiii) Eastcote, (xiv) RAF Fairford, (xv) RAF Farnborough, (xvi) RAF Fylingdales, (xvii) RAF High Wycombe, (xviii) RAF Honnington, (xix) RAF Lakenheath and RAF Feltwell, (xx) RAF Leuchars, (xxi) Landwater, (xxii) RAF Lyneham, (xxiii) RAF Morham, (xxiv) RAF Menwith Hill, (xxv) RAF Mildenhall, (xxvi) RAF Oakhanger, (xxvii) RAF Spadeadam, (xxviii) RAF Uxbridge, (xxix) RAF Valley, (xxx) RAF Waddington, (xxxi) Waterbeach, (xxxii) RAF Wittering, (xxxiii) RAF Wyton, (xxxiv) Ipswich and (xxxv) London. [33574]

Dr. Reid *[pursuant to his reply, 2 March 1998, c. 490]:* I regret to inform the hon. Gentleman that the information provided was incorrect. Accurate data are as follows: There are in the region of 13,500 members of the United States Visiting Force permanently based at some 30 locations in the UK. Precise information on personnel assignments is not held centrally. However, on the basis of the data that are available, total numbers of United States Service and civilian personnel as at 20 March are listed against the sites where they are located, together with details of MoD personnel located at the same sites.

Location	*US personnel*	*MoD personnel*
RAF Alconbury/Molesworth/Upwood	1,012	308
RAF Croughton/Barford St John	443	203
RAF Daws Hill/West Ruislip/Eastcote/USN London	770	76
RAF Digby	38	970
RAF Fairford/Welford	214	249
RAF Feltwell	132	3
RAF Fylingdales	1	257
RAF Hythe	5	13
RAF Lakenheath	5,294	655
RAF Menwith Hill	1,407	373
RAF Mildenhall	3,858	583
Northwood	16	1,712
RAF Oakhanger	1	255
RAF Spadeadam	4	174
RAF St Mawgan	295	803
RAF Uxbridge	1	182
Total	13,491	6,816

In addition to the above, there are approximately 200 US service personnel present in the UK, mainly serving in singleton posts at a wide variety of locations who are either participating in UK/US exchange programmes or engaged in specific bilateral projects or operational posts.

Officer Training Corps

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the membership of the Officer Training Corps in each institution in which it operates; [13757]

(2) what percentage of members of the Officer Training Corps subsequently join the regular forces. [13756]

Dr. Reid *[pursuant to his replies, 5 November 1997, c. 254 and 24 November 1997, c. 394]:* I regret to inform my hon. Friend that the figures for membership of the Officer Training Corps in Oxford and Cambridge were incorrect. They should be amended to read the following:

Officer Cadets:

Oxford: 192

Cambridge: 192.

The establishment figures remain unchanged at 224 for both institutions.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost to the armed forces of dealing with the millennium computer problem, including the embedded chip problem; how much has been spent to date; if he will break these figures down to distinguish between costs to *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [37994]

Mr. Spellar: The predicted cost to MOD of dealing with the Year 2000 date change problem is £200 million. This is the same figure as that reported in November 1997 and includes the cost of addressing the embedded chip problem. The cost estimate for the problems found so far

is £150 million, but is expected to rise to £200 million as the remaining systems are assessed and rectification work on them costed.

Some £4.4 million has been expended to date. This reflects only the cost of work so far completed. It does not include expenditure which has been contractually committed but not yet paid.

The year 2000 cost figures are collected within MOD on a budget holder basis and not by Service. The costs provided include the total for all of MOD's budget areas.

RAF Fast Jet Aircrew

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many (i) actual and (ii) peacetime establishment RAF fast jet aircrew are allocated to *(a)* Tornado GR, *(b)* Tornado F3, *(c)* Jaguar and *(d)* Harrier. [37934]

Dr. Reid: The information requested, as at 3 April 1998, is set out in the table:

Aircraft	*Fast jet aircrew*	*Total aircrew*[1]
Tornado GR1	Peacetime establishment	294
	Actual strength	274
Tornado F3	Peacetime establishment	265
	Actual strength	250
Jaguar	Peacetime establishment	60
	Actual strength	55
Harrier	Peacetime establishment	73
	Actual strength	73

[1] As at 3 April 1998

Uranium Shells

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how (1) how many depleted uranium shells have been fired at the MOD/DERA base at Dundrennan, Kirkcudbrightshire, in each of the years since such firing started; [37611]

(2) how many of the depleted uranium shells fired at the MOD/DERA base at Dundrennan, Kirkcudbrightshire, have subsequently been recovered. [37612]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Alasdair Morgan, dated 7 April 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency I have been asked to reply to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about depleted uranium shells at Kirkcudbrightshire.

The number of depleted uranium rounds fired at the Kirkcudbright range each year since the start of the CHARM programme are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1982	9
1983	56
1984	179
1985	152
1986	118
1987	151
1988	272
1989	434
1990	795
1991	666
1992	781
1993	982
1994	472
1995	280
1996	147
1997	749
1998	12
Total	6,255

During this period four of the CHAKM penetrators fired have been recovered.

I hope this information is useful.

Low Flying Training

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *414*, if the military exercises were carried out over the Sheffield area; what regulations govern *(a)* military and *(b)* other aircraft breaking the sound barrier; and if the sonic booms detected by Edinburgh University Seismology Unit above Sheffield, on 24 March 1997 were the result of aircraft breaking the sound barrier. [37991]

Mr. Spellar: It is not possible, twelve months after the date in question, to state precisely where military aircraft activity was being carried out. Records kept show only that aircraft were booked to carry out low flying over the Peak District between 2030 and 2107 hours local time on the evening of 24 March 1997. No low level flying is permitted over the Sheffield urban area, or any other major conurbation. Records of flying at medium level—between 2,000 and 24,000 feet—are not maintained so it is possible that there were aircraft in the area at medium level.

The regulations governing military aircraft flying at supersonic speeds are contained in the Joint Service Publication entitled 'Military Flying Regulations', an extract of which was provided in the answer I gave her on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *547–48*. The regulations which apply to civil aviation are a matter for my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

As for the sonic event detected by the British Geological Survey at Edinburgh University, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *414–15*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of incapacity benefit are suffering from pneumoconiosis and emphysema in the areas covered by the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency offices. [37909]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of Incapacity Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 6 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, asking how many claimants of Incapacity Benefit are suffering from pneumoconiosis and emphysema in the areas covered by the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency (BA) offices.

Information is not available in the format requested. As at 31 August 1997, there were approximately 20 people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) for emphysema in the area covered by the Peterlee office and none for pneumoconiosis. No customers were in receipt of IB for either condition in the area covered by the Seaham office.

Source DSS Analytical Services Division, based on a 5 per cent. sample of IB cases.

I hope that this is helpful.

Focus Groups

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the companies he has commissioned to undertake focus group research indicating the individual projects they are undertaking and the companies that tendered for each contract. [38218]

Mr. Field: The Department publishes a Research Yearbook which contains details of contracts awarded in the relevant financial year.

Organisations commissioned to undertake focus group research for the Department and the title of each contract are as follows:

Newchurch and Company—Child Support Agency customer and compliance research.

Market Opinion Research International—Attitudes towards welfare reform.

Market Opinion Research International—Attitudes to disability benefits.

British Market Research Bureau International—Attitudes towards housing benefits.

Institute for Employment Studies—People management in DSS Headquarters.

Social and Community Planning Research—On-going contract for qualitative research on welfare reform issues.

Social and Community Planning Research—Survey of women; development work.

Social and Community Planning Research—Preparation for Women's Juries.

Social and Community Planning Research—Work Incentives and Intermediaries.

Social and Community Planning Research—Take up of Income Support amongst Older Citizens.

Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University—Earnings Top Up Staff Panel.

Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University—Invalidity Benefit and the Contributory principle.

Alan Hedges—Pensions and Retirement Planning.

Alan Hedges—Behavioural Response to the evidence requirements.

Andrew Irving Associates—Counter fraud publicity.

Research Surveys of Great Britain—Awareness of counter fraud activity—benchmarking exercise.

One World—New Deal for Lone Parents: development of publicity work.

Navigator—Fraud: attitudes to national benefit fraud hotline publicity.

Reflexions—Fraud: reporting changes in circumstances.

Michael Herbert—Pensions: approaches to information material.

Research contracts are normally let by competitive tender, though the department also makes use of the Central Office of Information's framework agreement with approved suppliers. Single tender may be used for example where a supplier has special expertise or experience, is the sole supplier or has sole access to records or data, or in cases of extreme urgency. Details of organisations who have tendered unsuccessfully for contracts is commercial in confidence.

Lone Parents

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will publish a leaflet informing lone parents what help they can expect, and when, if they obtain paid work. [38234]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are already leaflets available which give information on the benefits payable to families in work with low incomes, including lone parents. Leaflet NI261 is a guide to Family Credit and leaflet RR2 is a guide to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Leaflet LP15 on the New Deal for Lone Parents outlines the help available for lone parents trying to get into work and gives a summary of the help available through benefits once the lone parent has obtained work.

Benefits Agency staff and New Deal for Lone Parents personal advisers are also available to give information on the precise amount of benefit available in each individual's circumstances. In the New Deal for Lone Parents, that advice is a component of the package of tailored help and advice provided for individual participants.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 2 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *505*, on lone parents, if she will update her earlier answer to cover the period from 23 July 1997 to 28 February 1998. [37593]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information on the operation of the New Deal for Lone Parents is available up to and including 28 February 1998.

As at 28 February 1998:

22,127 lone parents have been contacted.

5,249 initial interviews have been arranged, and 4,395 lone parents have attended interviews.

3,936 lone parents have agreed to participate in the programme following initial interviews.

1,289 lone parents have found jobs following agreement to participate in the programme.

A full independent evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents is being undertaken, to report in Autumn 1999. This will assess the overall effectiveness of the programme in helping lone parents move into employment.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Primary Schools Funding

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to change the funding rules for primary schools whereby income is lost due to a transfer of parents from income support to family credit. [34236]

Mr. Byers: There are no plans at present to change the funding rules for primary schools in this respect. Under Local Management of Schools, Local Education Authorities are responsible for devising and revising the formula used to allocate funds to schools. Some Authorities use pupils' entitlement to free school meals, which is triggered when a parent is in receipt of income support or income-based job seekers allowance, to allocate additional funding to schools. Families transferring from income support to family credit lose their entitlement to free school meals. Authorities may therefore need to consider whether their formulae should reflect this.

However, I understand that Oldham LEA's LMS formula uses entitlement to clothing grant rather than free school meals as the proxy for distributing additional funding to schools. Pupils from families in receipt of family credit or income support are automatically entitled to clothing grant. The change in benefit entitlement should not therefore affect Oldham schools' funding.

Education Action Zones

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list applications to run education action zones received from *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* other organisations; [36068]

(2) if he will list the private sector organisations which have applied to run education action zones; [36069]

(3) if he will list applications to run education action zones where the proposed zone crosses local education authority boundaries. [36070]

Mr. Byers: We have received 60 applications and intend to announce details of those which have been approved in due course.

Child Labour

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what support Her Majesty's Government are giving to the International Labour Organisation to eradicate child labour. [36541]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government strongly support the International Labour Organisation's proposal for a new Convention to eliminate the most intolerable forms of child labour. The UK will be actively involved in negotiating the new instrument during the ILO Conferences in 1998 and 1999. The UK has already committed £200,000 to the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) to finance work in Asia to combat trafficking of women and children. The Government will announce further contributions to this worthwhile programme in the coming weeks.

Job Clubs

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are his plans for funding the activities of job clubs over the next three fiscal years; and how these have been affected by the New Deal programme. [37470]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 7 April 1988:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question on the funding of Jobclubs over the next three fiscal years and how this has been affected by New Deal. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

Our planned expenditure on Jobclubs will be £24 million in each of the next three fiscal years.

In some areas we have also been looking at the advantages of combining some of our programmes, such as Jobclub and Jobplan, and delivering them through Programme Centres, which provide a one stop shop with greater scope for the more efficient use of resources and individualised packages of help for people.

The funding allocated to Jobclubs and Programme Centres reflects the likely demand among those people aged 25 and over who have been unemployed for six months or more. This takes account of the fact that many young people who might previously have depended on this provision will now be able to take advantage instead of the much more extensive extra help provided by New Deal.

My District Managers have recently undertaken a consultation exercise with local New Deal partners, with regard to our mainstream programmes, to determine which types of provision will be most effective to meet the needs of each locality. Where local partnerships decide that Jobclub or Programme Centre places should form part of the New Deal Gateway, they can purchase additional places on these programmes using New Deal funding.

I hope this is helpful.

Open Access Project

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to widen the scope of the open access project; and within what timetable. [37582]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 7 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question concerning the plans to widen the scope of the open access project; and within what timetable. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

The Employment Service is currently piloting ten open access kiosks in Jobcentres in Newcastle, South Manchester and Wiltshire, and we will be evaluating the use of the kiosks over the next few months. We will be making a decision on the future use of open access kiosks in the light of our evaluation of the pilot schemes and the availability of resources. The Employment Service is keen to use new technology to improve its services, and I expect the open access pilot to make a key contribution to this.

I hope this is helpful.

School Inspections

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how the random sample of schools inspected in 1994–95 and to be re-inspected in autumn 1998 was chosen by Ofsted; what advice was given to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector on how to ensure a random, balanced sample of schools; and by whom that advice was given; [37683]

(2) how many primary schools in England and Wales which were last inspected in 1994–95 are being inspected in autumn 1998; and what estimate he has made of the total cost of those inspections. [37684]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* These are matters for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his letter in the library.

Literacy Strategy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list the external bodies involved in the drafting of the literacy strategy; and if he will publish details of the research work on which the *(a)* concept and *(b)* details of the literacy strategy are based; [37762]

(2) if he will list the external bodies who were consulted prior to the development of the literacy strategy. [37763]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The literacy strategy is based on recommendations of the Literacy Task Force, established in may 1996 by the then Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Its membership was as follows: Professor Michael Barber (Chair), University of London Institute of Education; John Botham, Headteacher, Greenwood Junior School, Nottingham; Ken Follett, Novelist; Simon Goodenough, Chair of Governors, Queen Elizabeth Community College, Devon; Mary Gray, Retired Headteacher, Fair Furlong School Bristol; David Pitt-Watson, Deloitte & Touche; David Reynolds, Professor Education, University of Newcastle; Anne Waterhouse, Headteacher, Asmall County Primary School, Lancashire; and Diane Wright, a parent.

The Task Force drew widely on evidence of what works in this and other countries and took account of evidence from inspection reports and surveys from OFSTED. It consulted very widely before recommending that the National Literacy Project offered the best model for urgently achieving the improvement in literacy needed in our schools.

Job Vacancies (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the number of job vacancies in the *(a)* West Chelmsford parliamentary constituency and *(b)* Chelmsford Local Authority area in each of the last six months for which figures are available. [37877]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 7 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question in which you asked for a list of the numbers of job vacancies in the West Chelmsford Parliamentary constituency area and the Chelmsford Local Authority area in each of the last six months for which figures are available. This is something that fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

Vacancy data is only available by Jobcentre areas. West Chelmsford Parliamentary constituency and Chelmsford Local Authority area are both served by Chelmsford Jobcentre.

Vacancies notified to this Jobcentre were:

September 1997: 734

October 1997: 587

November 1997: 782

December 1997: 584

January 1998: 248

February 1998: 591

I hope this is helpful.

National Insurance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the annual cost to *(a)* higher education and *(b)* further education of the changes in employers' national insurance contributions announced in the Budget. [38316]

Dr. Howells: The Department is currently discussing estimates of these costs with the relevant Funding Councils. I will write to the hon. Member when these discussions have been completed.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 April 1998

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Listed Sporting Events

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *368*, on the Advisory Group on Listed Events, what is the cost of the group to public funds; how many witnesses have been called by the group, and if he will list them; and which member of the group was an expert on Rugby League Football. [37846]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Chairman and members of the Advisory Group on Listed Events were unpaid. Their expenses incurred in travelling to the meetings of the Group were paid from public funds at a cost of £1,499.78. The group heard oral evidence from the following:

Independent Television Commission:

Ms Sheila Cassells

Ms Sarah Thane

Major Spectator Sport Division, Central Council for Physical Recreation:

Lord Alexander of Weedon

David Glencross QC

Mr. Maurice Lindsay

Nr. Nigel Hook

The England and Wales Cricket Board:

Lord McLaurin of Knebworth

Mr. Terry Blake

The BBC:

Mr. Will Wyatt

Mr. Jonathan Martin

Mr. Dominic Morris

BSkyB:

Mr. Vic Wakeling

Mr. Ray Gallegher

Mr. Jonathan Sykes

Mr. Phillip Jenner.

The members of the Advisory Group were appointed not for their knowledge of particular sports but to represent the interests of the general viewing public. All of the members did, however, have a good, general knowledge of sporting issues and were provided with appropriate background information on specific sports events.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he expects to make a final decision on the listing of A and B grade sporting events for terrestrial television. [37917]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Advisory Group on Listed Events announced its recommendations to me on 20 March. These recommendations included the proposal that the list maintained under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996 should be made up of Group A and B events, these classifications defining the extent of the protection for television coverage of these events on generally available, terrestrial channels. I shall make my final decisions on this proposal, and on the events to be included on the list, when I have fully considered the implications of the Group's report. I hope to do so around the middle of May.

Lyric Theatre

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Eyre review of the future of lyric theatre in London will be made public. [38845]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have been informed by Sir Richard Eyre that his review of the future of lyric theatre in London will be submitted to me by mid-May; the slight slippage on the original timetable is due to Sir Richard's work commitments. I have undertaken to publish the report shortly after I receive it. Publication will then be followed by consultation.

Children's Television Programmes

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the current regulatory regime governing advertising during children's television programmes. [38302]

Mr. Fisher: The Independent Television Commission maintains and enforces a code of advertising standards and practice for commercial broadcasters, which includes detailed guidance on advertising and children. This guidance is reviewed by the Commission from time to time taking into account representations and available research as appropriate. The most recent review was conducted in 1997.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Criminal Cases (Inland Revenue)

Mr. Kemp: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration the Crown Prosecution Service has given to the implications of the judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in R v W and another; and what arrangements exist for liaison with the Inland Revenue about criminal cases with a tax aspect. [38837]

The Attorney-General: In the proceedings to which my hon. Friend refers the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) examined the respective of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Inland Revenue to pursue criminal proceedings. It confirmed that the Inland Revenue's common law power to prosecute is ancillary to, supportive of and limited by their duty to collect taxes. In contrast, the Crown Prosecution Service's statutory duty to take over and conduct criminal proceedings is free-standing, unconfined (for the purposes of the particular case) and reflects much wider public interest concerns and objectives. Accordingly, there is no logical inconsistency in the Crown's position if the Crown Prosecution Service prosecute in circumstances where the Revenue have decided not to.

This ruling accorded with the existing understanding of the Crown Prosecution Service and Inland Revenue as to their respective roles in relation to criminal investigation and prosecution and does not require any change of policy or practice on the part of either. Nor does it affect the position of those individuals who co-operate with the Inland Revenue on what is commonly referred to as 'the Hansard practice' or otherwise. Primary responsibility for investigation and prosecution in relation to alleged tax evasion rests with the Inland Revenue; proceedings brought by the Crown Prosecution Service will ordinarily encompass charges relating to tax evasion only in circumstances where that is incidental to allegations of non-fiscal criminal conduct. In such circumstances the Crown Prosecution Service and Inland Revenue liaise closely together. The arrangements for such liaison have recently been strengthened by the establishment of the 'Convention between Prosecuting Authorities to provide arrangements for ensuring effective co-ordination of decision making and handling in related cases which are the responsibility of different authorities'. Both the Crown Prosecution Service and Inland Revenue became signatories to that Convention when it was established on 11 February 1998. A copy of the Convention has been lodged in the Library of the House.

In R *v* W and others the applicants were charged on 27 July 1995 with offences of conspiracy to obtain property by deception (later changed to conspiracy to defraud) and conspiracy to commit false accounting in connection with the affairs of companies with which they were associated. The proceedings were transferred to the Crown Court on 6 November 1995. The prosecution case at this stage was that the motive for the alleged false accounting was partly to conceal the removal of company funds for purposes other than tax and partly the evasion of tax. The case in relation to false accounting was subsequently narrowed to allege only tax evasion. The Inland Revenue had, prior to the institution of the criminal proceedings, decided that its own inquiries should be pursued in relation to unpaid tax. This in turn led, in 1997, to a negotiated settlement of unpaid tax with the companies concerned.

The negotiation between Inland Revenue and the companies concerned was quite independent of the criminal proceedings although all parties were aware of their existence. Lord Justice Rose said in giving the judgment of the Court of Appeal:

"In any event we reject the suggestion that, because the prosecution case against both applicants on false accounting was previously based partly, but is now based solely, on tax evasion, this constitutes such a change that [the applicant], at the time of settlement by the companies was misled".

Audit Commission (Data Protection)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General if the provisions in the Audit Commission Bill [*Lords*] relating to studies into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of bodies subject to audit by the Commission permit *(a)* medical files containing health personal data processed by an NHS body to be used as part of a study into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness, *(b)* data matching studies with respect to any personal data held by a local authority and *(c)* medical files from one NHS body to be studied (i) in conjunction with similar files from another NHS body and (ii) in relation to files from a local authority. [38171]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The Audit Commission Bill [*Lords*] consolidates the existing legislation on the Audit Commission. Auditors and the Commission have a power to obtain access to all such information including medical files, as they may reasonably require for the performance of any of their statutory functions, including studies into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of bodies subject to audit. They must comply with Data Protection legislation, and the Commission has drawn up and published a Code of Data Matching Practice, endorsed by the Data Protection Agency, which it and auditors follow when data matching techniques are used.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *505*, what is the status of the assurance given by his Permanent Secretary that an employment guarantee would be provided for five years for CSL staff relocating from Norwich to York; and what contingent liability his Department has assumed is needed to fund this commitment. [37988]

Mr. Rooker: The Permanent Secretary has not given such an assurance. However, in the event of relocation of the CSL Norwich to York, consideration would be given as to whether medium term assurances of continued employment should be offered to staff who transferred. The level of resulting contingent liabilities would be one of the factors considered before giving such assurances.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Central Science Laboratory *(a)* scientists and *(b)* non-scientists in Norwich are in (i) mobile and (ii) non-mobile grades. [37955]

Mr. Rooker [holding answer 6 April 1998]: The information requested on staff based at the Central Science Laboratory in Norwich is as follows:

	Scientists	*Non-scientists*
Mobile	78	4
Non-mobile	31	24
Total staff	109	28

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many food research projects submitted to his Department for funding by the Central Science Laboratory in (1) 1996–97 and (2) 1997–98 which were (i) commissioned, (ii) deemed by the independent

appraisal panel to be of sufficient quality to merit departmental funding and (iii) not deemed to be of sufficient quality to merit such funding were based primarily at *(a)* Sand Hutton, York and *(b)* Colney Lane, Norwich. [37957]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The information requested, relating to research proposals submitted by the Central Science Laboratory to my Department, for funding in 1996–97 and 1997–98, is detailed.

Research proposals submitted to MAFF by CSL for funding

	Proposals for funding in 1996–97 (submitted to MAFF in 1995)		*Proposals for funding in 1997–98 (submitted to MAFF in 1996)*	
	Short-term research (applied)	*Long-term research (strategic)*	*Short-term research (applied)*	*Long-term research (strategic)*
Total number of CSL proposals considered	45	46	43	24
CSL Norwich	22	22	40	19
CSL Torry	22	23	3	3
CSL Slough	1	1	0	2
CSL York	0	0	0	0
Number of CSL proposals commissioned	15	14	12	10
CSL Norwich	13	11	12	8
CSL Torry	2	3	0	0
CSL Slough	0	0	0	0
CSL York	0	0	2	0
Number deemed by an independent Appraisal Panel to be suitable for MAFF funding	n/a	25	n/a	23
CSL Norwich	n/a	12	n/a	18
CSL Torry	n/a	12	n/a	3
CSL Slough	n/a	1	n/a	2
CSL York	n/a	0	n/a	0
Number deemed by an independent Appraisal Panel to be unsuitable for MAFF funding	n/a	12	n/a	1
CSL Norwich	n/a	8	n/a	1
CSL Torry	n/a	4	n/a	0
CSL Slough	n/a	0	n/a	0
CSL York	n/a	0	n/a	0

Notes:

1. Where n/a appears in the tables above, projects were appraised within MAFF with independent advice sought where necessary. These proposals were not considered by the independent Appraisal Panels. This is the case for all short term (applied) research proposals submitted to MAFF.
2. Proposals were not submitted from CSL York until 1997 (for funding in 1997–98), once staff had completed moves to CSL York from CSL Torry and CSL Slough.

Organophosphates

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the Government have spent in the last five years on research into the effects of pesticides based on organophosphorus compounds on the health of *(a)* cattle and *(b)* those working in the farming and horticulture industries. [38201]

Mr. Rooker: Applications for authorisations for veterinary medicines and pesticides are assessed against statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes the health and welfare of the treated animal and the user of the product. Research required to satisfy these criteria forms part of the information submitted by applicants and is paid for by them.

No MAFF-funded research has been carried out into the effects of organophosphorus (OP) compounds on the health of cattle.

In the past five years, the Government have commissioned work costing £3.6 million into the effects of OP pesticides on the health of those working in the farming and horticulture industries. In addition to this, the Institute of Occupational Medicine has been awarded £500,000 funded jointly by MAFF, the Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive to research the possible long-term human health effects of OP sheep dips. Additional work on the effects of OP pesticides has been carried out separately by Research Councils.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take into account the views of the American National Academy of Science prior to proceeding with restrictions on the retail sale of vitamin B6. [38103]

Mr. Rooker: The Government issued for consultation their draft proposals for restrictions on the retail sale of food supplements containing vitamin B6 on 2 April 1998. The consultation period ends on 26 June 1998. If further data on the safety of vitamin B6 become available during the consultation period, including information from the US National Academy of Sciences, those data will be taken into account by the Government.

Salmon And Freshwater Fisheries Review Group

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the membership and

terms of reference of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group announced on 7 July 1997; and if he will make a statement. [38516]

Dr. John Cunningham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have appointed Professor Lynda Warren, Professor of Environmental Law at the University of Wales, to chair the independent Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group. In addition, Dr. Nick Giles, Mr. John Golding, Dr. Keith Hendry, Mr. Derek Heselton MBE, Mr. David Hodgkiss, Mrs. Jean Howman, Mrs. Jane James, Dr. Mike Ladle, Mr. Frank Lythgoe, Mr. David Moore, Mr. Mervyn Mountjoy, Mr. Pat O'Reilly, Mr. Stanley Payne, Dr. Anne Powell, Professor Kerry Turner and Mr. John Williams have been appointed members.

The terms of reference for the Review Group are:

'To review existing policies and legislation in England and Wales concerning the management and conservation of salmon, trout, eels and freshwater fish and make recommendations. The review and recommendations should take particular account of:

- the need to maintain, and where appropriate enhance, biodiversity;
- the need to maximise the economic, social and recreational benefits derived from salmon and freshwater fisheries, taking account both of the interests of local communities and local factors and traditions;
- the need for management of fisheries to be on a fully sustainable basis, taking account of the precautionary approach.

The review should also consider other factors that may affect the development and sustainability of these fisheries.

The review should examine the institutional arrangements for the regulation and management of these fisheries (including the role of the public sector, the need to involve all interested parties, and arrangements in tidal and coastal waters) and how best such arrangements can be funded.'

Members have been appointed in an independent capacity on the basis of their individual knowledge and expertise of fisheries and/or related conservation issues. We believe the Group is well suited to making recommendations for the future management and conservation of salmon and freshwater fish and look forward to receiving its report in late 1999.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact the establishment of the Food Standards Agency will have on the role of the food safety activities of the Central Science Laboratory. [38347]

Mr. Rooker: The White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: a Force for Change": (Cmd 3830) proposes that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) should take the lead in commissioning research on food safety. It will be for the FSA to determine its own priorities and procedures for future research once it is established. However, the Government anticipate that the FSA will continue to commission research competitively, and that the Central Science Laboratory would compete for FSA research contracts, along with other research establishments.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements he will make to ensure co-ordination of the relevant work of the Central Science Laboratory with that of the Institute of Food Research following the establishment of the Food Standards Agency. [38348]

Mr. Rooker: The Central Science Laboratory already collaborates with the Institute of Food Research and with many other research institutes and universities. This ensures that respective scientific expertise is effectively applied.

Measures are in hand to strengthen the links between the Central Science Laboratory and the Institute of Food Research including the intention to develop a collaborative framework agreement.

Consumer Education

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the projects which received funding in the United Kingdom in 1997 under European Communities budget line "B5–102, Consumer Education"; and what was the role of his Department in the determination of such projects. [36952]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

UK bodies bid for Commission funding for specific projects. We do not yet have details of projects funded under budget line B5–102 in the UK during 1997. It is for the Commission to determine how to allocate funds within budget line B5–102 in accordance with Community rules.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid Projects (Environmental Assessments)

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what representations she has made to the European Commission about the environmental impact assessment of aid projects; [38406]

(2) what representations she has made to the European Commission about consultations with project beneficiaries and local communities in LDCs about the environmental impact of development co-operation programmes; [38407]

(3) what plans she has to bring about reform of the environmental assessment of EU aid during the current United Kingdom Presidency. [38408]

Mr. Foulkes: During the Presidency this Department's officials are continuing, through dialogue with Commission officials in Brussels and in delegations, and through our participation in the Commission's Management Committees, to encourage the Commission to integrate fully environmental considerations into the design of its projects, to improve environmental impact assessments and to promote the development of adequate stakeholder participation and consultation, including on the environmental impact of development projects.

An important element of this will be to monitor the Commission's implementation of the recommendations of a recent independent evaluation of environmental performance of EC-funded programmes in developing countries. This evaluation highlighted the need to improve the performance of the Commission in assessing and integrating environmental considerations in their

development programmes, including through training and guidance for staff and through better consultation with beneficiaries. Further to the evaluation, the Commission has contracted UK consultants to improve environmental assessment and consultation procedures in their programmes to Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. We will monitor progress closely. We have also seconded a Social Development adviser to the Commission to help them to promote stakeholder participation and consultation in development programmes.

South Africa

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress her Department has made towards negotiating a bilateral trade and development agreement including a free trade area with the Republic of South Africa; and if she will make a statement. [38337]

Mr. Foulkes: The UK Presidency is working for early conclusion of a Trade and Co-operation Agreement between South Africa and the European Union which best meets the needs of South Africa and her neighbours as well as the EU. Both sides hope for an agreement by mid-year. Negotiators from the European Commission and South Africa will hold the next round of discussions later this month.

Development Assistance

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of United Kingdom net development assistance has been *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* channelled through multilateral development institutions, the EU and the Commonwealth in 1997–98; and what will be the comparable figure in 1998–99. [38379]

Mr. Foulkes: Expenditure data for 1997–98 are still being brought to account. Detailed analysis will be provided in British Aid Statistics later in the year. We estimate though that in 1997–98 50 per cent. of development assistance will be spent through bilateral channels and 50 per cent. through multilateral institutions. Around 31 per cent. of development assistance will be spent through the EC.

In 1998–99, on present plans, we estimate that 46 per cent. will be spent through bilateral channels and 54 per cent. through multilateral institutions. Around 35 per cent. of development assistance will be channelled through the EC.

Know How Fund

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in respect of which countries Know How Fund support will be *(a)* reduced or *(b)* discontinued in 1998–99. [38192]

Mr. Foulkes: The Know How Fund is managed with some flexibility between country programmes within financial years. Levels of expenditure will depend partly on emerging needs and speed of project implementation. Our aim is to reduce expenditure over time on the countries most advanced in transition. Support is not being discontinued in any country in 1998–99.

Community Aid

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what effect the establishing of the joint service for the implementation of community aid to developing countries will have on her Department's aid management. [38339]

Mr. Foulkes: The establishment of the Joint Service is formally an internal management issue for the Commission but this Department has a strong interest in the effectiveness of the new arrangements. We are in close contact with the Commission about the restructuring and will seek to establish effective relations with the new structure when it becomes operational later this year. Other than this, the new structure will have no direct effect on the Department's aid management procedures.

Southern Africa

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with her counterparts in Southern African countries other than the Republic of South Africa about the proposed trade and development agreement and free trade area. [38336]

Mr. Foulkes: The proposed EU/South Africa trade and co-operation agreement will be discussed at next month's ACP-EU Council meeting in Barbados, which the Secretary of State will co-chair. We want an agreement which takes account of the concerns of South Africa's neighbours.

Direct Budget Aid

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to her EU counterparts about converting Community funding into direct budget aid. [38338]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has made no such representation.

Afghan Donors Group

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the oral answer of 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 489, what are the date and agenda for the next meeting of the Afghan Donors Group. [37712]

Mr. Foulkes: The date of the next meeting of the Afghan donors group is 5 May 1998. The provisional agenda is as follows:

Human rights and gender

The political and security situation in Afghanistan

Strategic Framework and international assistance strategy

Drugs control

Any other business.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the oral answer of 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 489, what is the composition of the Afghan Donors Group. [37711]

Mr. Foulkes: The Afghanistan Donor Support Group is an informal grouping of donors. Representatives of the following countries and organisations attended the last meeting, held in New York, and have been invited to the London meeting:

Australia, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States;

United Nations

Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (formerly Department of Humanitarian Affairs)

Department of Peace Keeping Operations

Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

Department of Political Affairs

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

United Nations Special Mission for Afghanistan

United Nations Children's Fund

Food and Agriculture Organisation

World Health Organisation

World Food Programme

United Nations Development Fund for Women

United Nations Drug Control Programme

United Nations Population Fund

United Nations Staff College

World Bank

International Committee of the Red Cross

Agency for Co-ordinating Afghan Relief

International Organisation for Migration.

Belarus and Ukraine

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects are currently being pursued to assist the economic development of *(a)* Belarus and *(b)* Ukraine. [37368]

Mr. Foulkes: In Belarus we are supporting the development of small and medium enterprises, for example through the creation of small business centres in Brest, Gomel and Grodno. We are also providing training for Trade Union members through the Jim Conway Foundation and plan to look for further opportunities to work with the NGO sector. In Ukraine we are supporting a wide variety of projects in the following sectors: agriculture, energy, financial services, small and medium enterprise development and good government.

SCOTLAND

Skye Bridge

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in respect of how many of those refusing to pay tolls on the Skye Bridge a decision was taken not to prosecute. [37562]

Mr. McLeish: The Procurator Fiscal at Dingwall has decided to take no proceedings against 133 individuals in respect of 188 charges of an alleged refusal to pay the tolls.

In addition, 138 people (some of whom may also be included in the figure of 133 above) were prosecuted for refusing to pay the tolls. The charges against these people were contained in 324 summary complaints. The Procurator Fiscal decided to take no further proceedings in relation to 177 of those complaints.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to public funds arising from the legal action taken against those refusing to pay tolls on the Skye Bridge. [37560]

Mr. McLeish: Expenditure has been incurred by various Government Departments in relation to the prosecutions of those persons refusing to pay tolls on the Skye Bridge.

The Scottish Court Service incurred additional costs for the provision of temporary shrieval cover amounting in total to £15,000. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service engaged casual administrative and legal staff at a cost of approximately £11,500. Expenses were also incurred in respect of civilian witnesses who attended to give evidence at the trials. The cost of the expenditure on these witnesses could not be made available without disproportionate cost.

The Northern Constabulary have incurred costs of £6,661 in relation to releasing police constables to attend at trials to give evidence.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board have paid out £1,708.03 in settlement of legal aid accounts. Further accounts totalling £12,500 have been submitted and are under consideration.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were *(a)* prosecuted, *(b)* fined and *(c)* imprisoned for refusing to pay tolls on the new Skye Bridge. [37561]

Mr. McLeish: In the period to 8 April 1998 138 people were prosecuted for refusing to pay tolls on the new Skye Bridge. The charges against them were contained in 324 summary complaints. 128 of those prosecuted were fined.

No one has been imprisoned for refusing to pay tolls on the Bridge.

Solway Firth (Fishing)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish his conclusion on mechanisms to maintain the present fishing arrangements on the Solway Firth; and what plans he has to introduce legislation on this matter. [37603]

Mr. Macdonald: It has long been recognised that fishing rights within the Solway can give rise to jurisdictional difficulties. Local discussions were held in autumn 1997 with a view to protecting existing fishing rights in the event of a fixed jurisdictional boundary being established. The Government are still considering how this protection might best be achieved.

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Government will review the legislation relating to the Environment Agency and Scottish

Environment Protection Agency in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. [38773]

Mr. Dewar: I am today setting in hand a review, jointly with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It will examine the legislation relating to the Environment Agency in England and Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, with a view to identifying any barriers preventing the Agencies from taking an integrated approach to the environment. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recommended in its nineteenth report (Cm 3165) that such a review should be carried out within 3 years of the Agencies' taking up their functions in April 1996.

The terms of reference of the review are:

To investigate the possible rationalisation of the regulatory mechanisms with the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency operate, and the opportunities for integrating regulatory regimes which currently operate on a similar basis but under different legislation, so as:

to identify any significant barriers to integration within each of the Agencies, whose removal would improve the quality of regulation by producing worthwhile improvements in environmental protection and enhancement, customer service and business efficiency;

to establish whether such barrier could be overcome by administrative means or management action by the Agencies; and

insofar as this is not the case, to recommend legislative changes to enable them to be removed.

The review is not intended to consider the integration of the philosophical approaches underlying the different regulatory regimes, which are often bound up with European Union legislation. Nor is the review considering integration of the Agencies themselves.

The review will be carried out by the relevant Government Departments and the Agencies. Interested bodies will be invited to contribute their views at an early stage. We envisage that the review will take about a year to complete.

Any legislative changes in England and Wales arising out of the review would be considered by Parliament. Since the results of the review will be submitted around the time of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, it would fall to Scottish Ministers to consider whether to put corresponding proposals to the Scottish Parliament.

TREASURY

Savings (Taxation)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was received *(a)* through taxes on savings and *(b)* taxes on savings on people over retirement age in each of the last three years. [36825]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 31 March 1998]:* Available estimates of the income tax liability on returns from savings are given in the table. These are based on projections of the 1995–96 Survey of Personal Incomes and other statistical sources in line with the economic assumptions of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, March 1998. The main components of savings income are bank and building society interest and dividends. Taxpayers over retirement age include women aged 60 and over and men aged 65 and over.

Full year yield from taxing savings income

(£ billion)

	All taxpayers	*Taxpayers over retirement age*
1996–97	5.9	2.1
1997–98	6.7	2.4
1998–99	7.0	2.6

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the financial impact of his Budget measures for motorists in receipt of mobility allowances. [37251]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* There were no specific measures in the Budget targeted at motorists in receipt of mobility allowances. Some motorists in receipt of Disability Living Allowance will benefit from the freeze in Vehicle Excise Duty, as well as the new reduced rate of £100 for the smallest and least polluting cars that will be introduced from next year. The uprating of bus fuel duty rebate, and the £500 million additional funding for public transport, will help provide affordable alternatives to the car for all motorists. In line with the Government's existing commitment, road fuel duties were increased by at least 6 per cent. in real terms on Budget day. These increases are expected to save 1.7 million tonnes of carbon a year by 2010, and all motorists will be affected by these changes.

Child Care Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the combined marginal withdrawal rate faced by someone who is receiving partial help with childcare costs under the proposed tax credit scheme and who is also *(a)* paying basic rate tax and NICs or *(b)* paying basic rate tax and NICs, and receiving housing benefit and council tax benefit. [36026]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 24 March 1998]:* The Working Families Tax Credit will provide substantially more financial support than is available at present under Family Credit and hence will significantly improve the reward for working. For example a two-child family with an after income tax of £250 and £60 a week in childcare costs will receive £36.70 more a week in WFTC than under FC.

All those above the income threshold and still receiving the WFTC, including the childcare tax credit, will face marginal deduction rates of:

(a) 69.85 per cent. if they are paying basic rate tax and NICs (reduced from 79.9 per cent. at present); or

(b) 95.48 per cent. if they are paying basic rate tax and NICs, and receiving housing benefit and council tax benefit (reduced from 96.99 per cent. at present).

However, due to the increased income from the Working Families Tax Credit, very few families will face the combined tapers of WFTC, housing benefit and council tax benefit. About 20,000 families, 0.1 per cent.

of those paying tax or NICs will face combined marginal deduction rates greater than 90 per cent. Less than 2 per cent. of families on WFTC will face all three tapers.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the potential for UK firms to benefit from increased international business as a result of their expertise in the management of Private Finance Initiative projects. [38240]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Treasury has received numerous visits and expressions of interest regarding the PFI from countries worldwide keen to learn of our experiences, and UK firms would of course be entitled to bid for PFI contracts abroad just as foreign companies are entitled to bid for contracts let here. PFI "practitioners" in the private sector too have reported heightened overseas interest.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has evaluated into the relative efficiency of the PFI against other forms of Government funding. [38221]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Government departments assess the relative efficiency of the PFI option, which itself relies on a competitive bidding procedure, against possible alternative forms of funding prior to the procurement of each service required. We have not yet done any general post-contract research into the value for money savings that have been achieved by proceeding via the PFI route, though the NAO has recently published four reports on the outcomes of PFI procurements in specific areas.

National Insurance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *567*, if he will make a statement amending paragraph 3.32 of the Red Book to reflect those ranges of weekly earnings in which employers will pay higher employer's NICs in respect of employees earning between £81 and £450 a week. [36441]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 26 March 1998]:* It is estimated that employer's national insurance contribution will rise in respect of approximately 2.1 million employees earning between £81 and £450 a week.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total amount of tax relief lost from *(a)* general PEPs and *(b)* single PEPs as of 5 April 1999 under the Budget decision to allow them continue in terms of (i) Capital Gains Tax relieved and (ii) dividend income tax relieved based on (A) the current rate of 20 per cent. and (B) the proposed new rate of 10 per cent. [36329]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* All PEPs held at 5 April 1999 can continue to be held as PEPs, outside the new savings account, but with the same tax advantages as the new account. The Exchequer cost of tax relief for these PEPs is estimated at around £900 million for 1999–2000, which includes a cost of £425 million for capital gains tax, and £475 million for income tax, of which some £200 million relates to the payment of tax credits at 10 per cent. on dividends on shares in UK companies, and £175 million is higher rate relief. Payment of tax credits at 20 per cent. would raise the cost by around £200 million. Estimates are subject to considerable uncertainty, since they are dependent on a range of assumptions including the level of take up, stock market performance and interest rates.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total amount of tax relief forgone through the operation of ISAs in each of the 10 years of their intended lifespan, in terms of *(a)* Capital Gains Tax relieved, *(b)* dividend income tax relieved and *(c)* income tax on deposit interest relieved. [36325]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* The total Exchequer cost of tax relief for the new savings accounts, including PEPs held at 5 April 1999 and remaining TESSAs, is estimated at around £1.6 billion for 1999–2000, which includes a cost of £425 million for capital gains tax, and £1,150 million for income tax, of which £225 million relates to the payment of tax credits on dividends on shares in UK companies and £250 million is higher rate relief. The total cost 2000–01 is estimated at some £1.8 billion, which includes a cost of £475 million for capital gains tax, and £1,325 million for income tax, of which £225 million relates to the payment of tax credits on dividends and £275 million is higher rate relief.

In future years the Government intend to continue spending broadly as much on the new savings accounts as would have been spent on PEPs and TESSAs. Estimates are subject to considerable uncertainty, since they are dependent on a range of assumptions including the level of take up, stock market performance and interest rates.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the additional cost to the Exchequer of introducing the individual savings account in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02, *(d)* 2002–03 and *(e)* 2003–04. [36397]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The Red Book shows an estimated yield of £30 million in 1999–2000, and an estimated cost of £30 million in 2000–01, compared with the cost of PEPs and TESSAs continuing with their current tax reliefs. The Government intend to continue to spend broadly as much on the new savings accounts in later years as would have been spent on PEPs and TESSAs.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if effective bed and breakfasts from a personal holding into a PEP account held by the same beneficiary will be admissible under Budget changes to the Capital Gains Tax rules. [36802]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The new CGT matching rule applies only to disposals and acquisitions undertaken by a person in the same capacity. Shares acquired by an individual through

a PEP manager will be acquired in a different capacity to shares sold by the taxpayer outside the PEP. So the new matching rule will not apply.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many countries in Europe operate a capital gains tax system which involves 18 or more different rates of capital gains tax. [36788]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* None. They either have a single rate or a small number of rates, as in the United Kingdom which presently, for individuals, has 3 rates and will continue to do so under the reforms proposed in the Budget.

Budget Green Book

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason no green book was published with this year's budget. [37520]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Financial Statement and Budget Report released on 17 March contained an environmental assessment of the Budget measures which will have a significant effect on the environment. The inclusion of the assessment within the Financial Statement and Budget Report demonstrates the Government's commitment to put the environment at the heart of the Government policy, and ensure that all environmental considerations are given full weight when formulating policy.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government plans to take to implement its policy of a stable and competitive exchange rate. [37759]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Government believe in the value of a stable and competitive exchange rate over the medium term, consistent with the objective of price stability. The Government are pursuing sound, long-term macroeconomic policies, which is the only sure path to exchange rate stability.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if people obtaining the disabled person's tax credit will be entitled to the same benefit payments as recipients of the disability working allowance. [37842]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The changes to tapers and thresholds announced in the Budget mean that most people will receive more from the Disabled Person's Tax Credit than they would have received from the Disability Working Allowance for a given level of pay, and no-one will receive less.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to begin consultation on his proposals to reform vehicle excise duty; what form the consultation will take; and if he will make a statement. [37285]

Dawn Primarolo: A consultation document seeking views on the options for reforming vehicle excise duty will be published shortly. The aim is to introduce a system which provides for a £50 reduction in vehicle excise duty for smaller, cleaner cars next year. In the meantime, vehicle excise duty rates are being frozen.

Customs and Excise (Tendering Contracts)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer upon what basis the choice of law clauses and exclusive jurisdiction clauses relating to English law and the English courts have been inserted into tendering contracts by H. M. Customs and Excise for civil recovery services. [34409]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer March 1998]:* Civil recovery services undertaken in Scotland are governed by Scots Law. The strategy adopted by Customs in stipulating that the civil recovery services contracts, including the contract in Scotland, would be governed by English law was based on legal and practical grounds which are set out.

Under contract law, the proper law of the contract is that which the parties stipulate;

Due to the complexity of these contracts, the need to establish uniformity and the fact that a single service provider may provide services in two countries eg England and Scotland, a policy decision was taken to stipulate that the contracts will be governed by English Law;

The aforementioned was influenced by the fact that the majority of the service requirement under the contracts would fall within English law; and

The overall contract management and policy responsibility for civil recovery services in Customs is located in England.

However, there is an opportunity for tenderers to register any disagreement with the General Conditions of Contract as an integral part of the tender process. The resolution of any disagreements would be a matter for post tender negotiation between Customs and the successful tenderer before award of Contract. Customs will not object to a request that the Contract be governed by Scots Law, if the service provider is based in Scotland.

Gaming Duty

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the casino industry on the proposed increase in gaming duty. [38110]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has received several representations from the casino industry about the impact of the gaming duty changes, mainly on the larger London clubs.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the impact on the profitability of British casino companies of the increase in gaming duty announced in the Budget; [38108]

(2) what assessment he has made of the economic impact of the increase in gaming duty announced in the Budget. [38109]

Dawn Primarolo: Overall the casino industry is undertaxed compared to most other betting and gaming sectors when looked at in terms of the effective rate of tax on the net consumer spend (broadly equivalent to the house winnings). In determining the changes to the duty

rates and thresholds careful consideration was given to the overall profitability of the industry as well as the likely impact on casino companies, taking account of their turnover, profitability, location and ability to bear the cost of the increase. The increase in gaming duty will raise £25 million in the first full year.

MI5

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy towards the publication in the press of disclosures by former MI5 officers. [37925]

Mr. Darling: The Government's policy in this area is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Pensions Mis-selling

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further progress has been made towards resolving cases of personal pensions mis-selling. [38751]

Mrs. Liddell: Today, I have placed in the Library a table showing what progress has been made by the 41 firms the Government have been monitoring in the period up to 31 March 1998. The table shows that, in line with the trend established in recent months, firms have continued to make progress, with some 69 per cent. of their priority cases now completed.

The Government continue to look to firms for their ongoing commitment to deliver the priority targets. I hope they will also work constructively with the regulators on the second phase of the review, building on the consultation launched by the Financial Services Authority and the Personal Investment Authority last month. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has set the right tone at the start of the process, and I hope that its pragmatic approach to the issues raised by phase 2 of the review will continue over the months ahead.

I have raised in this house on a number of occasions my concern that all pension firms, not just the large firms I am monitoring, must get on with the personal pensions review. Ultimately, responsibility for conducting the reviews rests with the firm concerned—be it a large company or a small IFA. However experience does show that cooperation and collaboration between firms can lead to progress in finding solutions to technical problems which are widely encountered. Recently, ABI announced an initiative to assist and to encourage IFAs to carry out their reviews. These proposals give welcome recognition to the fact that each and every firm's good name is dependent on the reputation of the industry as a whole, and I hope that early implementation of the proposals is achieved.

Progress by pension firms in completing reviews of personal pensions mis-selling in the period to the end of March 1998

	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*
Under 25 per cent. of cases resolved:								
DBS	3,392	128	222	68	154	105	3	9
25–50 per cent of cases resolved:								
Gan	11,369	867	4,417	556	3,861	2,927	26	38
Financial Options	353	108	36	19	17	14	4	40
Lincoln National	13,326	1,483	5,556	1,042	4,514	2,881	22	41
Burns Anderson	1,080	276	178	102	76	61	6	41
Countrywide	4,759	1,875	262	165	97	77	2	44
Windsor Life	9,475	2,837	1,958	276	1,682	1,402	15	48
50–75 per cent. of cases resolved:								
Standard Life	6,947	677	3,305	919	2,386	2,110	30	53
Abbey Life	17,354	4,251	6,200	912	5,288	4,183	24	54
Friends Provident	6,876	979	3,259	493	2,766	2,428	35	57
CIS	43,039	3,640	25,973	12,897	13,076	8,448	20	58
Canada Life	5,528	307	3,447	549	2,901	2,354	43	58
Colonial	8,242	2,238	3,205	360	2,845	2,219	27	58
London and Manchester	8,255	1,154	4,073	511	3,562	3,175	38	59
Royal & Sun Alliance	15,753	2,350	7,980	941	7,039	6,020	38	59
IFA Network	267	54	107	76	31	29	11	60
Hill Samuel	6,026	791	3,234	623	2,611	2,191	36	60
Sun Life of Canada	26,969	7,594	10,330	1,988	8,342	6,886	26	61
National Westminster	14,637	4,162	6,277	1,040	5,237	4,076	28	63
Allied Dunbar	18,867	3,358	10,735	3,149	7,586	6,066	32	67
Albany Life	2,931	587	1,799	161	1,638	1,253	43	68
United Assurance	12,962	1,061	9,993	1,927	8,066	5,891	45	69
Britannic	19,120	4,740	10,423	2,638	7,785	5,809	30	69
Equitable Life	7,384	1,693	3,761	1,460	2,301	2,024	27	70
Sedgwick	15,669	7,818	3,719	1,459	2,260	1,996	13	72
Berkeley Independent	143	87	18	14	4	3	2	73
Guardian	8,976	1,160	6,081	932	5,149	4,547	51	74
Over 75 per cent of cases resolved:								
Legal & General	36,726	14,568	16,131	1,590	14,541	11,390	31	75
M&E Network	302	167	65	24	41	37	12	75
Lloyd's TSB	49,062	10,840	28,883	6,093	22,790	20,371	42	76
Commercial Union	7,747	1,246	5,137	767	4,370	3,969	51	77
Godwins	1,478	109	1,229	441	788	611	41	79
Royal London	12,355	1,112	9,590	1,404	8,186	7,281	59	79

Progress by pension firms in completing reviews of personal pensions mis-selling in the period to the end of March 1998

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Wesleyan	4,173	255	3,285	956	2,329	2,103	50	79
Pearl	46,213	3,430	38,760	5,572	33,188	29,987	63	82
Norwich Union	7,389	2,233	4,619	728	3,891	3,261	44	84
Prudential	72,010	19,432	52,563	3,866	48,697	37,519	52	84
Barclays	16,981	6,197	9,411	2,169	7,242	6,265	37	86
Hogg Robinson	2,084	821	1,102	386	716	593	28	86
AXA Equity and Law	3,943	774	2,817	600	2,217	2,070	52	87
Midland	4,840	498	4,243	631	3,612	3,334	69	92

A: Cases identified as requiring review.
B: Of A, cases where investor was informed that information gained during assessment excluded cases from review.
C: Number of assessments completed.
D: Cases where the investor has been informed that no redress is due.
E: Cases where redress has been offered.
F: Cases where redress has been accepted.
G: Cases where redress has been accepted as a percentage of cases identified for review ((F/A)x100).
H: Cases completed, including exclusions, as a percentage of cases identified for review (((B+D+F)/Ax100).

Civil Registration System

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to improve public access to the Civil Registration System. [36828]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Phil Woolas, dated 8 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics(ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on improving public access to the civil registration system.

The public access the civil registration system in many ways. The newly established Family Records Centre (FRC) in Islington provides improved facilities for people who wish to search the indexes of birth, marriage and death in England Wales since 1837. Certificates of these events can be purchased via the FRC or by post, phone or fax. Whilst service developments are planned, some significant improvements (such as access to the records themselves or computerisation of the indexes) require legislative change or significant investment.

At a local level, the public register births and deaths and use the civil marriage facilities in Register Offices and Approved Premises. Local Authorities are responsible for the provision of Register Office facilities and are increasingly upgrading them. They are also increasingly tailoring the service provision to their local circumstances. The Registrar General provides advice to Local Authorities and monitors the standard of the local services.

Lloyd's of London

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net contribution of Lloyd's of London to the United Kingdom balance of payments over *(a)* the period 1 January 1988 to 1 January 1992 and *(b)* 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1997. [38178]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Philip Hammond, dated 8 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the net contribution of Lloyds of London to the United Kingdom balance of payments.

Information relating to the contribution to the current account of the Balance of Payments of Lloyd's of London from 1988 to 1997 can be derived from data available on the ONS database, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library. The estimates for underwriting services (series HCCZ) include receipts for management services provided to overseas members of Lloyd's syndicates. Estimates for earnings on portfolio investment overseas (series HCPB) include income on funds which are held overseas to support business underwritten in those countries. This income is net of earnings distributed to Lloyd's overseas members.

Labour Market Statistics

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what further action is being taken to improve the accuracy and reliability of Labour Market Statistics; and if he will make a statement; [38370]

(2) what plans he has to increase the frequency and coverage of the Labour Force Survey; and if he will make a statement. [38369]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Andrew Love, dated 8 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions on the accuracy and reliability of labour market statistics and the Labour Force Survey in particular.

On 3 February, I announced major improvements to labour market statistics. As part of the package of proposals, I announced that greater prominence than previously would be given to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and to the integration of these results with data from other sources.

From April 22nd 1998 data from the LFS for the latest 3 months will be published every month. Coverage of the LFS results will be extended to the UK. The case for a larger LFS capable of providing reliable estimates for each single month is being considered in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

These improvements to the way ONS publishes its labour market statistics are being supported by a great deal of work in improving the methods of data collection, getting more out of the data, and reconciling the different sources. In parallel with improvements in other ONS surveys, methodological improvements in the LFS will be put in place. More information about these improvements is available in the February 1998 edition of *Labour Market Trends*, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Teenage Mothers

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children were born to teenage mothers in the Wakefield District *(a)* in 1980 and *(b)* in the last year for which figures are available. [38281]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 8 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your question on children born to teenage mothers.

The numbers of livebirths in 1980 and 1996 to mothers aged under 20 who were resident in Wakefield Metropolitan County District were as follows:

496 in 1980

360 in 1996.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the perinatal death rate of children born to teenage mothers *(a)* living in the Wakefield District and *(b)* in England as a whole. [38323]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 8 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the perinatal death rate of children.

The perinatal death rate per 1,000 live and stillbirths of children born to teenage mothers in 1993–1996 (combined) was (a) 11.0 in Wakefield Health Authority, and (b) 11.1 in England as a whole.

Capital Transfer Tax

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what arrangements exist for the enforcement of access to *(a)* heritage land, *(b)* property, *(c)* works of art and *(d)* chattels in respect of items which have been the subject of exemption from capital transfer tax; [37498]

(2) what arrangements exist for the policing of assets and payment of capital transfer tax in the case of assets which have been the subject of heritage status capital transfer tax exemption and which are subsequently sold by the beneficiaries of legacies or their trusts; [37499]

(3) what arrangements are made for access to *(a)* heritage land, *(b)* property, *(c)* works of art and *(d)* chattels by the general public where such access forms part of the agreement for exemption of such items from capital transfer tax. [37497]

Dawn Primarolo: Owners' compliance with their undertakings relating to tax exempt land and buildings is regularly monitored on behalf of the Inland Revenue by the appropriate heritage advisory agency. As part of this monitoring, owners have to submit annual reports which include matters regarding the provision of public access, and there are on-site inspections every five years. In addition, the Inland Revenue separately review all cases at five yearly intervals.

Public access and other conditions relating to exempt works of art and chattels are monitored directly by the Inland Revenue. Each case is reviewed every five years and there is an annual selective audit of objects to which public access is only by prior appointment.

Any material failure by an owner to comply with the undertakings results in a tax charge on the current value of the asset.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the definition of heritage land for the purposes of capital transfer tax exemption; [37490]

(2) what is the definition of heritage property for the purposes of capital transfer tax exemption; [37491]

(3) what is the definition of heritage works of art for the purpose of capital transfer tax exemption; [37492]

(4) what is the definition of heritage chattels for the purpose of capital transfer tax exemption. [37493]

Dawn Primarolo: Under existing law (section 31 Inheritance Tax Act 1984) conditional exemption may apply to the following assets:

pictures, prints, books, manuscripts, works of art or scientific collections of national, scientific, historic or artistic interest;

land of outstanding scenic or historic or scientific interest;

building of outstanding historic or architectural interest, and any land essential for the protection of their character and amenities;

any objects historically associated with a qualifying building.

A number of changes to the exemption scheme were announced in the recent Budget. An Inland Revenue press release on Budget Day set out the proposed changes.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Inland Revenue's arrangements for valuing *(a)* land, *(b)* property, *(c)* works of art and *(d)* chattels for capital transfer tax purposes. [37494]

Dawn Primarolo: The value of an asset is not a relevant factor in deciding a claim for conditional exemption from inheritance tax (or its predecessor, capital transfer tax). When an asset ceases to be conditionally exempt, tax is charged on its market value at that time. For this purpose, the Valuation Office Agency advises on the value of land and buildings, and the Heritage Section of the Capital Taxes Office deals with valuation of works of art and other chattels.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total value of the exemption to capital transfer tax in the case of *(a)* heritage land, *(b)* property, *(c)* works of art and *(d)* chattels in each of the last five years. [37495]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available in the form requested. The estimated cost to the Exchequer of conditional exemption from inheritance tax (and its predecessor, capital transfer tax) is as follows:

£ million

Year	Amount of relief	
	Land & Buildings	Chattels[1]
1992–93	[2]negligible	40
1993–94	[2]negligible	40
1994–95	[2]negligible	55
1995–96	5	25
1996–97	5	30

[1] Includes works of art
[2] Negligible means less than £3 million

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to review the arrangements for the exemption from capital transfer tax of *(a)* heritage land, *(b)* property and *(c)* chattels; and if he will make a statement. [37496]

Dawn Primarolo: In his recent Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced changes to strengthen the conditions of inheritance tax (and its predecessor capital transfer tax) exemptions for heritage assets. An Inland Revenue press release on Budget Day set out the proposed changes.

"Financial Statement and Budget Report"

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will expand Table B24, page 136, in the FSBR, March 1998, to give the relevant figures for *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03, using the assumption of 0.75 per cent. real growth in public spending after 1998–99. [36375]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The Government have not published spending plans beyond 1998–99. However, figures for the years 1999–2000 to 2002–2003, based on real growth in public spending of 3/4 per cent. a year from 1999–2000 onwards, can be calculated as follows:

Projections for General Government Receipts (GGR), General Government Expenditure (GGE) and the Control Total as a percentage of GPD from 1999–2000 to 2002–2003 are set out in tables B8 and B12 of the FSBR (March 1998). Revised forecasts for "net taxes and NICs" were published in table B8 on 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *348*.

Table B5 of the FSBR contains medium-term forecasts of the public sector current balance, borrowing requirement and general government financial deficit on a UK national accounts basis. As these projections exclude windfall tax receipts and associated spending and the UK definition of GGFD is slightly different from the Maastricht version, the following small adjustments are necessary to produce figures on a consistent basis to those set out in Table B24: the current balance should be adjusted downwards by 0.1 per cent. of GDP throughout; the PSBR should be adjusted upwards by 0.2 per cent. of GDP in 1999–2000 and 0.1 per cent. of GDP in later years; and GGFD should be adjusted upwards by 0.2 per cent. of GDP in 1999–2000, 0.1 per cent. of GDP in 2000–01, 0.2 per cent. of GDP in 2001–02 and 0.1 per cent. of GDP in 2002–03.

Medium-term projections of the public sector financial deficit can be derived by adjusting the PSBR slightly to exclude financial transactions Financial transactions are 0.1 per cent. of GDP in 1999–2000 and in 2000–01, 0.3 per cent. of GDP in 2001–02 and zero in 2002–03.

GGE (X) can be derived from GGE by excluding privatisation proceeds, lottery-financed expenditure and interest and dividend receipts. These amounted to 0.8 per cent. of GDP in 1999–2000 and in 2000–01 0.7 per cent. of GDP in 2001–02 and in 2002–03.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would the RPI indexation factor be for capital assets held over the next 10 years based on a comparable rate prevailing over the last 10 years. [36789]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The RPI indexation factor for the 10 years to February 1998 is 0.546.

Tax Relief

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual tax relief saving to the Treasury from the phasing out of retirement relief from April 2003. [36791]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* If the present retirement relief thresholds of £250,000 and £1 million applied in 2003–04 and assuming unchanged taxpayer behaviour it is estimated that the cost of retirement relief would be about £200 million.

Cross-border Shopping

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the independent report on cross-border shopping. [37982]

Dawn Primarolo: Following my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's announcement of a review of alcohol and tobacco fraud in his Budget of 2 July 1997 I asked Customs to undertake the review consulting widely with the trade, and other public bodies and interested parties.

As to the publication of the outcome of the review, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *202*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Safety

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made in the development of legislation on fire safety. [38835]

Mr. George Howarth: On 28 November, the Government published a consultation document entitled "Fire Safety Legislation for the Future", copies of which are in the Library. The consultation period closed on 28 February 1998 and between the Home Office and the Scottish Office, we have received around 450 responses.

We have decided to proceed with a thorough overhaul of fire safety legislation along the lines set out in the consultation document. However, some difficult areas such as Houses of Multiple Occupation and licensed premises need more detailed discussion and consideration before we can take a decision on them and we will need to tie in with other separate aspects. We will now work up detailed proposals in close co-operation with interested parties. Subject to clear evidence of cost effectiveness of the proposals, we will aim to legislate as early as practicable.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the European Commission has issued a letter under Article 169 of the Treaty of Rome challenging the United Kingdom's implementation of the general fire safety provisions of the European Framework Directive. [38836]

Mr. George Howarth: I can confirm that such a letter has been received from Commissioner Flynn on behalf of the Commission.

To avoid prejudicing any legal proceedings that might result, the detail of the letter and the reply to it must remain confidential between the Commission and Her Majesty's Government. However, I can say that, in broad terms, the Commission's concerns relate to the need to justify the exceptions we have made from the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, (among them, one for fire certificated premises). They are also concerned that the duties placed on employers by these Regulations should fully reflect the unconditional nature of the responsibilities and obligations imposed on employers by the Framework Directive.

The Government have decided that they will take the necessary steps to address the Commission's concerns about meeting the terms of the Directive in full. Such steps should be consistent with the emerging findings of the recent consultative exercise, "Fire Safety Legislation for the Future". The steps would involve making changes to the 1997 Regulations. Officials will begin to consult interested parties immediately upon the implications of this and the best way to proceed.

Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to strengthen immigration legislation to tackle abuse of the United Kingdom's immigration control. [38843]

Mr. Straw: The Government are firmly committed to ensuring that those who seek to migrate to the United Kingdom, but have no grounds for doing so under the Immigration Rules, are prevented from coming here. We have today by Order extended the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 to Eurostar services arriving from Brussels to reduce the large numbers of inadequately documented passengers using this route over recent months.

The Order as drafted does not extend to SNCF (the operators of services from France) because of their current position under French law. But we have agreed with the French Government measures to enhance operational co-operation until a longer term solution can be found.

From 0001 hours on Friday 10 April we will require nationals of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia to obtain Direct Airside Transit Visas to come to the United Kingdom even when they intend to remain airside while in transit through the United Kingdom. We have taken this action following evidence of abuse of the Transit Without Visa concession by such nationals.

Prison Inspections

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set for the interval between a prison visit being made by the Chief Inspector of Prisons and a report being published. [37452]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *546*.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 19 March. [38844]

Mr. Straw: I chaired the Council on behalf of the Presidency. My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin) represented the United Kingdom. The main matters dealt with were as follows.

The Council agreed a number of 'A' points, including a Council Decision on sharing the cost of preparing film masters for the uniform format of residence permits; Council conclusions on the G8 recommendations on organised crime and terrorism, and on the G8 principles on high tech crime; instruments on the exchange of information in immigration and asylum matters and on dealing with missing persons and unidentified corpses; reports on the Europol Drugs Unit's activities for 1997 and its work programme for 1998; and rules governing certain aspects of Europol's operation, in preparation for when the Europol Convention comes into force. These rules covered the Europol computer system, receipt of information from third states and third bodies, and confidentiality for the information held by Europol.

In addition, the Council agreed as 'A' points a number of joint actions enabling Community funding of Third Pillar activity. The Odysseus programme will support training, exchanges and co-operation in the field of asylum, immigration and the crossing of external borders. The Falcone programme will support exchanges, training and co-operation in the fight against organised crime. Community funding will also be available to support projects in favour of displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees.

The Council agreed Presidency proposals designed to improve openness and transparency in justice and home affairs, in particular by making details of proposals available more easily and earlier, providing more frequent and more detailed information for the Press, and having open debates on particular topics from time to time. A Council decision to publish a comprehensive public register of Council documents was also agreed as an 'A' Point.

The Council had a full discussion of the justice and home affairs implications of the enlargement process on the basis of a Presidency paper. The Council re-affirmed the need for Justice and Home Affairs Ministers (JHA) in the member states, and national experts, to be fully involved in the enlargement process, and underlined the importance of effective monitoring of the progress made by the applicant states in taking on and implementing the JHA acquis. Ministers agreed that enlargement should feature as a standing item on future JHA Council agendas.

The draft Convention on driving disqualification was discussed, and provisional agreement reached on the text. However, some further work is still needed on a small number of outstanding issues.

The draft Joint Action to establish a European Judicial Network was discussed. The text has now been agreed by all but one member state, which was not prepared to lift its reserve at the Council. The Presidency will pursue bilateral contacts with the member state concerned. Another Joint Action concerning participation in a criminal organisation was agreed subject to one minor reserve, and should be formally adopted shortly.

The draft Convention on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters was discussed, and considerable progress made on a number of outstanding points.

The Council received a progress report on ratification of the Europol Convention. This showed that only three member states have yet to complete the necessary procedures for ratifying the Europol Convention, and hope to do so before the end of the United Kingdom Presidency. The Council also agreed in principle to advance the date when Europol's mandate with regard to terrorism will become effective.

The Council reviewed implementation of the action plan on the influx of migrants from Iraq, taking note of a report of a recent visit by the Presidency to Turkey, which is a major country of transit for migrants.

The Council also considered the current state of negotiations on the Eurodac Convention on fingerprinting of asylum seekers. It was clear from the discussion that a number of issues remain to be resolved and that further work will be required on this important instrument.

Implementations of the Dublin Convention was also discussed. This Convention, which has only recently come into force, establishes the state responsible for deciding asylum applications. The Council took note of ongoing work to draw up a programme of action aimed at ensuring effective implementation of the convention.

Prison Population

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of prisoners are currently serving sentences for *(a)* cannabis offences, *(b)* other illegal drug offences and *(c)* murder; and what is the average annual cost for each category of prisoner. [38383]

Mr. George Howarth: There were 51,580 sentenced prisoners in England and Wales at the end of February 1998, including 3,190 (6 per cent.) individuals serving life sentences for murder and 7,970 (15 per cent.) serving sentences for drugs offences. Information on the numbers of prisoners serving sentences for drugs offences involving cannabis were published in "Statistics of drug seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1995 Supplementary tables", a copy of which is available in the Library. These statistics show that on 30 June 1995 (the latest available estimate) 33 per cent. of persons under sentence for drugs offences in England and Wales were held for cannabis offences.

The Prison Service does not hold information centrally on the costs of prisoners based on type of offence. The average cost of a prison place for all prisoners in the financial year 1996–97 was £24,271.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of new prisons which will need to be built in the next 20 years and of their total construction costs. [38364]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend announced on 19 June 1997 that the Government would proceed with the prison building programme to deliver 2,400 new places at four contractually managed, privately financed prisons by 1999–2000.

The Government are taking a fresh look at Prison Service spending after 1998–99, including the long-term need for new prisons, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responsibilities the Police Information Technology Organisation has for ensuring millennium compliance in all national IT and communication systems and local IT systems. [38321]

Mr. Michael: The Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) provides national information services to all forces through the Police National Computer (PNC). The PNC is expected to be millennium compliant by early 1999.

Individual chief officers are responsible for ensuring that their local force Information Technology (IT) and communications systems continue to operate beyond the millennium. At the request of chief officers, PITO is supplying advice and guidance to forces to help them in the discharge of that responsibility.

In addition, PITO is responsible for co-ordinating the development and delivery of local IT systems under the National Strategy for Police Information Systems. Three such systems—the HOLMES 2. Custody and Case Preparation applications—will be available by March 1999. A number of forces are expected to take delivery of these applications as replacements for existing non-compliant systems.

Polling Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to monitor the facilities made available for the disabled to vote in the local government elections in May; [38344]

(2) what new guidelines he has issued to returning officers in relation to improving disabled access at polling stations. [38345]

Mr. George Howarth: We are developing a voluntary national standard on access to polling stations for disabled voters and guidance will be issued on this in due course. The Society of Local Authority Chief Executive Officers is also reminding its members to pay particular attention to this matter at the May local elections in the light of recent recommendations by organisations such as SCOPE. We will not, however, be carrying out a specific monitoring exercise this year.

Domestic Violence

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for offences related to domestic violence were undertaken in the last year for which figures are available. [37830]

Mr. Michael: Information collected centrally on court proceedings is not held in sufficient detail to distinguish domestic violence from other violent offences. Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings database does not record the relationship between defendant and victim. In some circumstances, this may be implicit through legislation, for instance the offence of infanticide under the Infanticide Act 1938, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of offences connected with domestic violence were prosecuted in the West Midlands Region; and in how many cases a conviction was achieved in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [38071]

Mr. Michael: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave her on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *545*.

Voluntary Sector

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *16*, which of the recommendations of the Deakin Commission report he plans to implement; and if there will be any divergence from the Government response outlined in "Raising the Voltage". [36571]

Mr. Michael: The Government recognise the valuable contribution of the Deakin Commission Report to the debate about the relationship between the Government and the voluntary sector. The majority of the Report's recommendations were directed not to the Government but to others, particularly voluntary organisations themselves. The document, "Raising the Voltage", published in November 1996, was the previous Government's response to the Deakin Commission Report. It rejected a key recommendation that a 'concordat' between central Government and the voluntary sector should be drawn up, as a code of good practice, for future relations.

The conclusions of the Deakin Commission Report helped inform the policies contained in the document, "Building the Future Together", published in March 1997 by this Government when in Opposition. "Building the Future Together" proposed the establishment of a compact as a framework for future relations between Government and the voluntary sector. Policy towards the voluntary sector will be developed within that framework.

MI5

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what briefings Treasury Ministers have given on the funding of MI5; what meetings have taken place between Treasury Ministers and journalists at which MI5 was discussed; and which journalists were involved. [37671]

Mr. Straw: This is not a matter for me.

Circus Animals

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *536*, on circus animals, if he will list the species of the animals concerned. [37913]

Mr. George Howarth: Information held on the Home Office Court Proceedings database concerning offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911. Performing Animals (Regulations) Act 1925 and the Protection of Animals Act 1934 does not identify the species involved.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the real terms change in his Department's budget between 1996–97 and 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [38286]

Mr. Straw: In real terms (at 1996–97 prices), the total budget for the Home Office and Charity Commission has increased from £6,486 million in 1996–97, to £6.525 million in 1998–99. This is an increase of £39 million or 0.6 per cent. The Home Office Annual Report 1998 (CM 3908), published on 6 April, gives further information on these budgets.

Altcourse and Parc Prisons

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the prisoners at Her Majesty's Prison Parc, Bridgend, are normally resident in England. [38287]

Ms Quin: No information is available centrally regarding the principal address of those committed to custody in England and Wales. Information provided by Parc prison shows that 18 per cent. of prisons currently held at the prison are recorded as resident in England.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the last day for which figures are available, how many and what percentage of prison places at (i) Her Majesty's Prison Altcourse and (ii) Her Majesty's Prison Parc were occupied; if he has updated his assessment of the cost incurred in respect of unused places since the prisons opened; and if he will make a statement. [38285]

Ms Quin: Altcourse prison held 631 prisons on 3 April 1998, 5 per cent. above the normal full occupancy of 600 prisoner places.

Parc prison held 753 prisoners on 3 April 1998, 5.9 per cent. (47 places) below the full occupancy figure of 800 available places payable under the contract.

For Altcourse, the total value of unoccupied places during the build-up period was £102,000, but based on recent estimates of the cost of overcrowding in local

prisons, the actual cost of holding prisoners elsewhere would have been £15,000. In addition, a reduction of £142,000 against the price for places delivered on schedule was negotiated with the contractor for places used earlier than planned.

The value of unused places at Parc, from opening date to 3 April 1998, is £1.2 million. The actual cost to the Prison Service of holding the balance of prisoners elsewhere in local prisons is substantially less. Based on recent estimates of overcrowding costs in local prisons it is estimated to be £257,000.

Feltham Young Offenders Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with the Department of Education and Employment on the educational needs and funding of remand prisoners under school leaving age in Feltham Young Offenders Unit. [38145]

Ms Quin: None. Feltham provides under school leaving age remand prisoners with at least 15 hours' education per week. This equates to the hours it is required to provide, under the Young Offender Institution Rules, to convicted inmates aged younger than 17.

All education delivered in Prison Service establishments is based on a core curriculum of basic educational skills, basic Information Technology skills and life and social skills. The Prison Service is now working on a new model regime for Young Offender Institutions. This will provide a broader curriculum and more hours of education for Young Offender Institution inmates, both on remand and convicted. It will take account of the National Schools Curriculum, but will be tailored to the needs of the majority of such young offenders, whose schooling histories are usually poor.

Home Detention Curfew

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long a prisoner in receipt of a licence including a curfew condition under sections 86 and 87 of the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*], as amended on report in the House of Lords, will spend in custody when sentenced to a sentence of imprisonment of *(a)* three months, *(b)* four months and *(c)* eight months. [38164]

Ms Quin: The sliding scale which determines the point at which prisoners may be granted a home detention curfew licence is set out in the Bill.

Prisoners sentenced to three months' imprisonment may be released after 30 days and then be subject to a home detention curfew licence until the half-way point of their sentence; prisoners sentenced to four months' imprisonment may be released after serving one quarter of that term and then be subject to a home detention curfew licence until the half-way point of their sentence; and prisoners sentenced to eight months' imprisonment may be released after serving half the term less 60 days which they will then spend subject to a home detention curfew licence.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *465*, if he will make a statement on the exceptional circumstances in which a prisoner convicted of an offence to which Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 applies will be given early release from their sentences subject to a home detention curfew. [38187]

Ms Quin: In recognition of the particular type of risk posed by such offenders, my right hon. Friend has decided that prisoners who are convicted of an offence to which Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 applies, should not be included on the home detention curfew scheme save where there are exceptional circumstances. Each case will be considered on its merits to determine whether there are exceptional circumstances, in the light of our overall objective of protecting the public.

CS Spray

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines exist on the decontamination of the area in the vicinity of use of CS spray. [38172]

Mr. Michael: CS spray is bio-degradable and does not require any special decontamination procedure. Normal ventilation will remove CS from the environment in approximately 45 minutes, although this might take a little longer depending upon the amount of CS spray used and the level of ventilation. Normal washing of clothing will be sufficient to remove CS from it, although sometimes it may take several washes depending upon the amount of CS used.

The Association of Chief Police Officers has issued guidance to all forces in England and Wales on this subject. As part of their training in the use of CS spray, all officers are aware that the above advice should be given to all occupants of premises or vehicles where CS spray has been used.

Data Protection Bill

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons persons responsible for safeguarding national security need protection from the offence identified in Clause 54(5) of the Data Protection Bill [*Lords*] as provided for in the provisions in Clause 27(1) of that Bill. [38190]

Mr. George Howarth: Because actions taken for the purpose of safeguarding national security might otherwise be treated as criminal offences.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in respect of Clause 28(1)(c) of the Data Protection Bill [*Lords*], he will list examples of impositions which are similar to a tax or duty; if the provision is intended to apply to *(a)* council tax and *(b)* parking fines; and if he will make a statement. [38189]

Mr. George Howarth: In the Government's view

"any imposition of a similar nature"

is likely to include national insurance contributions and the council tax but not fines.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in respect of the Data Protection Bill [*Lords*], the *(a)* national insurance number and *(b)* NHS number fall within a general identifier as defined in Schedule 1, Part II, paragraph 4; and if he will make a statement. [38191]

Mr. George Howarth: The scope of the general identifier category is a matter for secondary legislation.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in respect of the Data Protection Bill *[Lords]*, he will make a statement concerning the restoration of the exemption in Clause 28(4). [38188]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are reconsidering the extent of the need for subject information and non-disclosure exemptions; and how they might best be dealt with.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last five years indicating the approximate value of each item stolen. [37979]

Mr. Straw: A list of equipment reported stolen from my Department in the last five years, with the approximate value of each item stolen is:

£

Item	*Value*
1997–98 (latest available reported data)	
Laptop computer	6,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	1,500
Laptop computer	1,500
Personal computer	1,550
Personal computer	1,005
Personal computer	434
Personal computer	100
Computer printer	1,593
Computer printer	329
Computer monitor	500
Computer keyboard	40
Computer mouse	22
Computer mother board	150
Fax modem	130
Mobile phone	118
Video camera	1,500
Video camera	800
Video	300
Tools	500
Tools	131
Field gates	240
Pressure washer	3,317
Armoured cable	200
Desk fan	41
Desk fan	40
1996–97	
Laptop computer	5,400
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	1,000
Laptop computer	1,800
Laptop computer	2,100
Laptop computer	1,800
Laptop computer	2,500
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	1,500
Personal computer	3,888
Personal computer	2,800
Personal computer	3,400
Personal computer	1,450
Personal computer	1,199
Personal computer	1,000
Personal computer	65
Personal computer	40
Personal computer	300
Personal computer	800
Personal computer	911
Personal computer	80
Computer monitor	300
Computer monitor	492
Computer base unit	800
Computer printer	1,341
Computer printer	300
Computer printer	750
Computer printer	1,120
Computer keyboard	33
Computer keyboard	35
Computer keyboard	20
IT equipment	417
Computer software	1,010
Computer chip	160
Computer chip	130
Encryptor	2,000
Video equipment	644
Video equipment	1,580
Video camera	75
Ansaphone	80
Ansaphone	80
Vehicle	1,200
Vehicle	9,200
Vehicle	16,337
Vehicle	10,150
Vehicle	5,400
Vehicle	6,100
Electric drill	69
Tools	177
Tractor	1,480
Brush cutter	370
Fax machine	450
Petrol strimmer	150
Battery	100
Lawnmower	505
Dictaphone	70
Dictaphone	86
1995–96	
Laptop computer	500
Laptop computer	2,624
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	500
Laptop computer	1,000
IT equipment	3,700
Computer equipment	55,000
Computer equipment	5,700
Computer chips	8,000
Computer chips	8,000
Computer chips	350
Computer chips	100
Computer chips	1,500
Personal computer	800
Computer base unit	5,300

Item	£ Value
Computer base unit	3,000
Computer base unit	6,672
Printer cartridges	280
Laser printer	1,000
Colour printer	3,500
Computer printer	920
Computer printer	1,000
Power tools	800
Power washer	2,800
Pressure washer	1,344
Livestock trailer	3,000
Vehicle	10,000
Ansaphone	70
Equipment	722
Equipment	3,055
Camcorder	600
TV/Video	1,000
1994–95	
Personal computer	779
Personal computer	3,000
IT equipment	22
IT equipment	1,200
IT equipment	800
IT equipment	850
IT equipment	1,050
IT equipment	747
IT equipment	569
IT equipment	1,200
IT equipment	2,000
IT equipment	3,000
IT equipment	300
Equipment	3,500
Equipment	100
Equipment	746
Equipment	746
Equipment	100
Office equipment	80
1993–94	
IT equipment	2,500
IT equipment	1,127
IT equipment	5,000
IT equipment	5,000
IT equipment	1,500
Trailer	2,473
Garden tools	740
Garden tools	2,389
Garden tools	486
Garden tools	259
Power washer	525
Telephone	23

Volatile Substance Abuse

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he has had with *(a)* retailers, *(b)* manufacturers, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* police, *(e)* voluntary organisations and *(f)* other Government departments with regard to the banning of the sale of butane gas products to under 16-year-olds; [38144]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of a ban on butane gas products sales to under 16 year olds on the mortality and prevalence rates of volatile substance abuse. [38147]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are currently considering the desirability and practicality of introducing a 16 year age limit on the sales of gas lighter refills. The consultation process is at an early stage, and no full assessment of the effects of such a measure has yet been made; but Home Office officials have recently met representatives from local authorities, and have sought the views of other government departments on the proposal. Consultation with other interested bodies will take place shortly.

Criminal Investigations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal investigations have been running for longer than 12 months at the latest date for which figures are available. [38209]

Mr. Michael: There are no centrally held statistics about criminal investigations which are still in progress or which have not been resolved or concluded. It is not clear to me what purpose would be served by any such statistics.

Birds Of Prey

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *705*, how many prosecutions have been mounted and convictions secured for the illegal persecution of the hen harrier since 1988. [38211]

Mr. George Howarth: Information held on the Home Office Court Proceedings database concerning offences against birds under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, does not identify the species involved.

However, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' annual report for 1996 shows that three hen harriers were known to have been killed illegally in that year.

Pop Music and Criminal Behaviour

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will commission research on the effects of pop music on criminal behaviour. [38174]

Mr. Michael: I have no plans to do so. If my hon. Friend has specific concerns, I would be willing to consider any information she wishes to send to me.

Prison Education

Mr. White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent educational achievements are taken into account when considering the early release of prisoners; and what plans he has to incorporate a compulsory educational element into some sentencing. [38283]

Ms Quin: The primary concern when considering the early release of offenders is risk to the public. While educational achievements in prison may suggest that an offender is making an effort to equip him/herself for life in the community, they will play only a small part in the assessment of the level of risk which early release may pose. Among the proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill is a Detention and Training Order for juvenile offenders. One of the features of the Order is the provision for early

(or late) release from custody to reflect the young person's progress against their sentence plan. The plan will be designed to prevent further offending and will include addressing the educational needs of the young offender.

Tobacco Sales

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been collected in fines from independent retailers for selling tobacco to those aged under 16 years in each year since 1979. [38307]

Mr. Michael: Information is not collected centrally by the Home Office on the amount of moneys received for fines imposed for specific offences.

The table shows the number and amount of fines imposed on offenders convicted for offences relating to the sale of tobacco to persons aged under 16.

Number of offenders fined and amount of fines for offences relating to the sale of tobacco to persons aged under 16[1], 1979–1996

England and Wales

Year	Total number fined	Amount of fine (£)	Average fine (£)
1979	11	130	12
1980	10	145	15
1981	15	200	13
1982	7	93	13
1983	27	610	23
1984	39	1,635	42
1985	24	990	41
1986	13	405	31
1987	12	510	43
1988	22	1,410	65
1989	59	4,355	74
1990	56	4,715	84
1991	79	8,695	110
1992	36	3,935	109
1993	85	13,496	159
1994	75	17,065	228
1995	124	28,462	230
1996	101	22,810	226

[1] Offences under Section 7 of the Children & Young Persons Act 1933 as amended by Section 1 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Maze Prison

10. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to protect the lives of prisoners in the Maze prison. [36898]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement to the House on the Narey Inquiry report on 2 April 1998.

Mr. Narey has made 59 recommendations, many of them relating to the personal security of prisoners. It is our intention to take forward as many of these as possible now that the report is published, but other recommendations require detailed consideration and project teams are being put in place to address these.

In addition my right hon. Friend has asked the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, for an assessment of the regime at Maze in so far as it impacts on prisoner safety. We will consider his recommendations on receipt of the report.

Tourism

11. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the current prospects for the tourist industry in the Province. [36900]

Mr. Ingram: Given an uncertain political situation, which has a considerable impact on tourism, it is difficult to make projections for tourism revenue and numbers of visitors to Northern Ireland. However, forecasts for 1998 suggest modest growth in terms of revenue to £215 million and overall visitor numbers are anticipated to increase to 1.45 million.

"Partnership for Equality"

12. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what responses she has received to the Government's White Paper, "Partnership for Equality". [36901]

28. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what responses she has received to the Government's White Paper, "Partnership for Equality". [36917]

Mr. Worthington: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friends the Members for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) and for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty).

Small Firms

13. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the impact the Budget proposals on small firms will have on the Northern Ireland economy. [36902]

Mr. Ingram: The budget's measures for small firms, which include a reduction in Corporation Tax rate and generous first year capital allowances will encourage growth and investment by small firms in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the UK. They are, however, particularly welcome in Northern Ireland where small firms represent a greater proportion of the economy.

Democratically Elected Institutions

15. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what ways the proposed democratically elected institutions will differ from the district councils in Northern Ireland; which powers the Government intend to transfer to these bodies; and if she will make a statement. [36904]

Mr. Ingram: Following agreement in the talks the proposed Assembly for Northern Ireland could exercise devolved executive and legislative responsibility over at least the responsibilities of the six Northern Ireland Government Departments.

Income Support

16. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion and number of children aged under 16 years live in families receiving income support. [36905]

Mr. Worthington: The latest information available shows that 21.4 per cent., or 89,090, of children in Northern Ireland are living in families receiving income support.

Multi-party Talks

17. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to admit representatives of the Conservative party to the peace talks. [36906]

Mr. Ingram: None.

19. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on progress in the multi-party talks in Northern Ireland. [36908]

23. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on progress in the multi-party talks. [36912]

25. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the prospects of agreement in the multi-party talks. [36914]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell).

Child Care

18. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the impact of the Budget proposals on child care in Northern Ireland. [36907]

Mr. Worthington: I welcome the additional assistance for families with young children which the Chancellor has announced in the Budget. I am considering how a range of affordable quality child care can be secured throughout Northern Ireland. I intend to issue a Northern Ireland child care strategy for consultation before the summer.

Irish Constitution

20. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have been held during the current peace talks on the policy of the Irish Government towards the repeal of those articles in their constitution which relate to a territorial claim over Northern Ireland. [36909]

Marjorie Mowlam: When the British and Irish Government presented their propositions on Heads of Agreement in the talks on 12 January, they confirmed that as part of any settlement they envisaged balanced constitutional change, based on commitment to the principle of consent in all its aspects, including changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution as well as in British constitutional legislation. Discussions are continuing in the light of these propositions.

Grammar Schools

21. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the position of grammar schools in Northern Ireland. [36910]

Mr. Worthington: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 11 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *249*.

Peace Process (Referendum)

22. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what preparations she is making for a referendum on the outcome of the peace process. [36911]

Mr. Paul Murphy: It remains our firm goal to hold a referendum on May 22 1998, following agreement in the all party talks in Belfast. The necessary legislation to enable us to hold the referendum will be introduced after Easter.

Minimum Wage

24. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the Northern Ireland Economic Council's report on the minimum wage; and if she will make a statement. [36913]

27. **Mr. Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the Northern Ireland Economic Council report on the minimum wage; and if she will make a statement. [36916]

Mr. Ingram: The Northern Ireland Economic Council is a useful and comprehensive survey of the extent and nature of low pay in Northern Ireland. It has been submitted to the Low Pay Commission which I am sure will find it very helpful. The report shows Northern Ireland to be significantly more affected by low pay than other UK regions. The National Minimum Wage will therefore have particular importance for Northern Ireland.

Road Accidents

26. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for each year since 1988 *(a)* the number of road deaths, *(b)* the number of serious injuries on the roads and *(c)* the increase in traffic volumes. [36915]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Road deaths*	*Serious injuries*	*Traffic volumes (billion kilometres)*
1988	178	1,969	—
1989	181	2,014	—
1990	185	1,993	—
1991	185	1,648	12.53
1992	150	1,841	12.83
1993	143	1,725	13.22
1994	157	1,648	13.65
1995	144	1,532	14.08
1996	142	1,599	14.25
1997	144	1,548	—

Surveys of traffic volume were not carried out prior to 1991. The figures for 1997 are not yet available.

Electricity Interconnector

29. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the establishment of an electricity interconnector with Scotland. [36918]

Mr. Ingram: This private sector project is principally a matter for NIE and Scottish Power. Consent for the Scottish leg of the project was granted by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, on 13 October 1997.

My noble Friend, the Minister for the Environment (Northern Ireland), announced on 26 March 1998 his decision to approve the revised outline planning application submitted by Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) for the siting of the converter station at Islandmagee. This is conditional on the acceptance by NIE of the Notice of Opinion to approve the application, which will be subject to appropriate conditions.

Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths in each of the past nine years in Northern Ireland resulted from the use of *(a)* heroin, *(b)* temazepam, *(c)* cocaine/crack, *(d)* LSD, *(e)* solvents, *(f)* amphetamines, *(g)* ecstasy, *(h)* paracetamol, *(i)* co-proxamol, *(j)* khat, *(k)* alcohol, *(l)* tobacco and *(m)* cannabis. [38354]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is set out in the table. Deaths in Northern Ireland are recorded according to date of registration and not by date of occurrence. Deaths involving paracetamol and co-proxamol are not available separately being included in a wider category of "aromatic analgesics". Deaths involving tobacco are classified according to the underlying cause of death, eg lung cancer, heart disease, etc.

Death causes Northern Ireland 1988–1996

	Total deaths								
Substance	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
(a) Heroin	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(b) Temazepan	3	2	1	1	—	3	1	2	—
(c) Cocaine/Crack	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(d) LSD	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(e) Solvents	7	12	9	9	9	11	6	5	4
(f) Amphetamine	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(g) Ecstasy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
(j) Khat	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(k) Alcohol	51	41	75	70	57	56	84	96	87
(m) Cannabis	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths of people aged over 60 years in Northern Ireland resulted from *(a)* over-medication, *(b)* suicide and *(c)* other misuse of medicinal drugs in each of the past 10 years. [38351]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The number of deaths of people aged over 60 years as a result of drug misuse including suicide are set out in the table. Deaths in Northern Ireland are recorded by date of registration and not by date of occurrence.

Northern Ireland: deaths

Year	*Cause of death*		
	Over medication	*Suicide*	*Other misuse of medical drugs*
1987	—	2	—
1988	2	6	—
1989	1	6	—
1990	2	5	—
1991	1	4	—
1992	2	7	—
1993	2	4	—
1994	—	6	—
1995	2	5	—
1996	2	3	—

Security Forces (Collusion Allegations)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations she has received on alleged collusion between the security forces and paramilitary forces in Northern Ireland. [37887]

Mr. Ingram: Sinn Fein passed to the Government a report containing allegations of alleged collusion, which has been passed to the RUC. I also receive letters from time to time which mention allegations of collusion.

Inward Investment

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the tax incentives for companies setting up in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland. [36899]

Mr. Ingram: The competitiveness of Northern Ireland's financial incentive package and the overall attractiveness of the business opportunity, including taxation aspects, is regularly reviewed. Repeated investments in Northern Ireland by companies such as Nortel, Fujitsu and Emerson reinforce the continuing competitiveness of the Northern Ireland business opportunity.

Orange Order Parade

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons police recommendations to charge a number of Republicans for obstructing an Orange Order annual church parade at Mountfield in County Tyrone were rejected by the Director of Public Prosecutions; how many recommendations had been made; and if she will make a statement. [37819]

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

On 7 October 1997 the Royal Ulster Constabulary submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions (Northern Ireland) a police investigation file relating to 30 persons with a view to possible prosecution for offences arising out of events at Mountfield, County Tyrone on 22 June 1997. An interim direction issued to the Chief Constable on 16 October 1997 to arrange a consultation with the investigating officer and a number of police witnesses and for certain additional inquiries to be made. A second consultation was held on 18 December 1997 with investigating police and other senior officers. It was concluded that, in respect of the persons reported, the evidence was insufficient to afford a reasonable prospect of obtaining a conviction. Accordingly, a direction for no prosecution was issued to the Chief Constable on 22 December 1997.

Criminal Trials

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General in how many cases between 1985 and 1995 the Attorney-General's representative was asked to present the Crown's case at a criminal trial in Northern Ireland; in what circumstances the DPP was not represented; and in what capacity Mr. Brian Kerr appeared during the trial of Mr. Brian Nelson. [37805]

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

I have taken my hon. Friend's reference to "the Attorney-General's representative" to mean senior Crown counsel appointed by the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland. Senior Crown counsel were instructed by the DPP(NI) to prosecute on three occasions during the period 1 January 1991 to 31 December 1995, the only period for which complete records are available. This includes the conduct by Mr. Brian Kerr QC (as he then was) of proceedings against Brian Nelson. When the DPP(NI) initiates, undertakes or carries on criminal proceedings, he is always represented either by counsel or professional staff.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 8 April. [37886]

Mr. Prescott: I have been asked to reply.

The Prime Minister today is in Northern Ireland where he is involved in the peace talks.

DEFENCE

Britannia

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the former Royal Yacht Britannia. [38772]

Mr. George Robertson: I have decided that Britannia should be preserved in Edinburgh, in the Port of Leith. Subject to a satisfactory conclusion to negotiations, the former Royal Yacht will be sold to an independent charitable trust being promoted by Forth Ports plc. The trust will take responsibility for the preservation of Britannia, and for running the Yacht as a visitor attraction and as a venue for conferences and other functions. Both Forth Ports and the Manchester Ship Canal Company offered very good ideas; either would have allowed Britannia to be preserved successfully and with dignity. It has been a difficult choice, but a good outcome for Britannia. I am grateful to both for having put forward such excellent proposals.

Britannia is expected to leave Portsmouth in the next few weeks, and, following essential work to adapt her to her new role, will be open to the public later this year.

Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the Key Targets set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency for the Financial Year 1998–99. [38841]

Dr. Reid: The Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency has been set the following Key Targets for the Financial Year 1998–99:

Key Targets 1

To establish a mechanism and baseline to enable subsequent measurement of improvements in the range of Material provided.

Key Targets 2

To exceed 5 per cent. increase of the number of items procured by Direct Supply.

Key Targets 3

To exceed 90 per cent. of Customers' perceived satisfaction of requirements.

Key Targets 4

To exceed 80 per cent. of underlying availability of Material.

Key Targets 5

To exceed 5 per cent. improvement in commodity management process cycle times.

Key Targets 6

To establish unit costs per output data to enable the setting of realistic efficiency targets for subsequent years.

Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the Key Targets set for the Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency for the Financial Year 1998–99. [38842]

Dr. Reid: The Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency has been set the following Key Targets for the Financial Year 1998–99:

Key Target 1

To exceed 95 per cent. satisfaction for the processing of Consumers' authorised demands.

Key Target 2

To meet the Customers' agreed requirements for the provision of ammunition Units of Space (UOS) and ammunition processing facilities.

Key Target 3

To exceed 95 per cent. of Consumers' perceived satisfaction of the Agency.

Key Target 4

To exceed 90 per cent. of meeting Consumers' authorised demands within Supply Chain Processing Time (SCPT) Depot Processing Time (DPT).

Key Target 5

To exceed a one day improvement in receipts processing cycle times.

Key Target 6

To establish unit costs per output baseline to enable subsequent measurement of efficiency improvements.

Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key targets set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency for the financial year 1998–99. [38776]

Dr. Reid: The Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency has been set the following key targets for the Financial Year 1998–99:

Key Target 1:

To achieve a 2 per cent. improvement in the range of postal and courier services provided.

Key Target 2:

To achieve an independent assessment of DPCSA using the British Quality Foundation (BQF) Business Excellence Model (BEM) by 31 March 1999, to enable subsequent measurement of business improvements.

Key Target 3:

To exceed an average 95.85 per cent. satisfaction of Customers' postal and courier requirements.

Key Target 4:

To exceed an average 2 per cent. improvement in unit costs per output.

Defence Transport and Movements Executive

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key targets set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive for the financial year 1998–99. [38775]

Dr. Reid: The Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive has been set the following key targets for the Financial Year 1998–99.

Key Target 1:

To exceed 90 per cent. of customers' perceived satisfaction of requirements.

Key Target 2:

To establish the baseline for the quality of the Unaccompanied Baggage Service, to enable subsequent measurement of improvements.

Key Target 3:

To exceed 90 per cent. satisfaction of customers' requirements.

Key Target 4:

To establish unit costs per output data to enable the setting of realistic efficiency targets for subsequent years.

Army Storage

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decision he has made on the implementation of the recommendations in the Army's storage rationalisation study. [38839]

Dr. Reid: The consultation process on the conclusions of the Army's storage rationalisation study, which recommended the closure of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA) sub-depots at Thatcham in Berkshire and Old Dalby in Leicestershire, has now ended. A number of representations were received from the trades unions, local councils, individual employees and hon. Members. Having considered these representations very carefully, I am satisfied that no issues have arisen which would call into question the study's recommendations. I intend, therefore, to proceed to implement these recommendations with the objective of ceasing operations at the sub-depot at Old Dalby by 1 April 1999 and that at Thatcham by 1 April 2000.

Reservists

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to continue to call out reservists to support military operations. [38840]

Dr. Reid: A new call-out order has been made under Section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996. This will allow us to continue calling out members of the reserve forces in support of operations in Yugoslavia and in the region of Iraq. The order will cease to have effect on 31 March 1999. All reservists called out are volunteers.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *192*, what is the total acreage, excluding foreshore, of the Pendine range. [37966]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* this is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 8 April 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Defence and Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the area of the Pendine range.

The total acreage, excluding foreshore, of the Pendine range is 2519 acres.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list *(a)* the contracts awarded to COMAX by DERA, *(b)* the length of each contract, *(c)* the cost of each contract and *(d)* the number of staff employed on each contract; [37905]

(2) if he will list the contracts undertaken by COMAX at DERA Pendine, the number of staff employed on each contract and the cost of each contract in 1997–98 and 1998–99. [37906]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 8 April 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Defence and Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), I have been asked to reply to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about contracts awarded to COMAX by DERA and about contracts undertaken by COMAX at DERA Pendine.

All DERA's business with Comax is awarded under a single "Umbrella Contract" which was placed on 25 April 1997. Most of the business is spread over 12 Service Level Agreements, nine of which are based on geographical regions and three of which are for pan-DERA services, as shown in the following table:

£ million

Service level agreement	*Period (from 25 April 1997)*	*Cost*
1. Farnborough Site Cluster	4 years 9 months	19.2
2. Boscombe Down Site Cluster	4 years 6 months	7.8
3. Porton Down Site Cluster	4 years	6.1
4. Fort Halstead Site Cluster	5 years	7.3
5. Chertsey Site Cluster	3 years	8.3
6. Portsdown West Site Cluster	5 years	7.0
7. Malvern Site Cluster	3 years 6 months	7.0
8. Ranges Site Cluster	4 years 3 months	10.3
9. Financial Services	5 years 3 months	7.7
10. Information Services	5 years 3 months	27.2
11. Supply Services	5 years 3 months	4.0
12. Farnborough Aerodrome	Until 31 December 2000 unless sooner terminated by DERA by 6 months notice to expire on or after 31 December 1998	3.1
Total		115

Under the same Umbrella Contract, catalogued goods and services (for example, reprographics, car hire, consumable etc) were ordered totalling £13.1M. Separate contracts were also placed totalling £5.7M. These figures cannot easily be reconciled to the SLA locations. COMAX employs circa 1300 staff under the single Umbrella Contract.

As far as DERA Pendine is concerned, COMAX provides contract services under the Service Level Agreement for the Ranges Site Cluster that covers 16 DERA ranges. The value of the Pendine element is approximately £1M. DERA has also placed a separate contract for demolition at Pendine valued at £104K. I understand that COMAX employs 14 direct staff on the Pendine site.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the central administration costs allocated to DERA Pendine *(a)* for 1996–97, *(b)* for 1997–98 and *(c)* projected for 1998–99; [37907]

(2) what were the total central administrative costs of DERA in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what are the projected costs for 1998–99. [37914]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 8 April 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Defence and Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), I have been asked to reply to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the central administrative costs of DERA and the central administrative costs allocated to DERA Pendine.

The central administrative costs of DERA charged to business sectors are as follows:

	£ million
1996/97	45.7
1997/98	37.2
1998/99	37.9

These costs include corporate management functions, services provided centrally such as finance, security, health and safety, personnel, contracts, marketing, quality, intellectual property and information systems, and charges incurred centrally on behalf of the whole Agency such as insurance, subscriptions and audit fees. The costs for 1996/97 also include those for divisional management (Defence Research Agency, Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation, Protection and Life Sciences Division and Centre for Defence Analysis) which were abolished as a result of the reorganisation on 1 April 1997.

The amount of the DERA central administration charge allocated to Pendine for each year is as follows:

	£000
1996/97	258.9
1997/98	274.6

The allocation in the budget for 1998/99 is £169.3K.

As well as these central administrative charges, there are additional administrative charges allocated by the Ranges Sector itself, as follows:

	£000
1996/97	103.6
1997/98	[1]142.6
1998/99	[2]213.0

[1] Based on the forecast for accounting period 11
[2] Budget

I hope that this information is helpful.

Alcoholism (Armed Forces)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on alcoholism in the armed forces; and if he will place the results in the Library. [38177]

Dr. Reid: All three Services run comprehensive education packages to combat alcohol misuse. In addition, each of the Services have in place arrangements for treating and rehabilitating those who display signs of alcohol dependency. These measures are kept under review and amended and re-focused as necessary. To this end, the individual Service authorities are free to initiate or commission research as necessary. The most recent such commission was made by the Army in late 1995 when a pilot study was undertaken by a civilian company into the use and misuse of alcohol. A fuller study was

subsequently conducted by the same company during 1996–97. The study found that the incidence of problems of alcohol misuse among Army personnel was broadly similar to that experienced by an equivalent section of society of the same demographic and socio-economic make up. The report highlighted areas where improvements could be made in education and awareness and these are being addressed. The report is an internal management document and is being used in the development of alcohol policy and awareness training; the interviews on which its conclusions are based were given in confidence. There are therefore no plans to publish the report.

Military Research and Development

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those civil developments which he assesses to have resulted from Government-funded military research and development since 1990. [38332]

Mr. Spellar: The transfer of technology from military research and development into civil markets is promoted by the Ministry of Defence, in support of the wider Government objectives of increasing wealth creation within the UK industry.

An exhaustive list of civil developments resulting from Government-funded military research and development would be difficult to compile; however, recent examples include:

Uncooled infrared thermal imaging technology, which enables clear sight in total darkness or even through smoke, is now in use in helmet-mounted cameras for fire-fighters and hand-held cameras for security, law enforcement, drug interdiction, industrial thermography and wildlife protection worldwide.

Light, strong casing technology, designed for the LAW-80 antitank rocket, has been adapted for use in torus-shaped compressed air containers which are shortly to be tested by the Health and Safety Executive. These could be a major improvement over current cylindrical designs, due to their reduced weight for the same air pressure and volume.

Research into damping vibrations in military helicopters led to the discovery of a thin, flat structure with excellent sound radiation properties. This technology, which will allow flat panel loudspeakers for wall mounting or mobile public address systems, has been licensed to a civil firm for development and production.

The scope for DERA's dual use activities is under consideration, both as part of the Strategic Defence Review, and with the publications of the Defence Diversification Green Paper on 5 March 1998.

Export Organisations

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the different roles of the Defence Export Services Organisation and the Export Opportunities Service (Defence and Security). [38331]

Mr. Spellar: The Defence Export Services Organisation, DESO, is a part of the Ministry of Defence. Its role is to provide British defence exporters with the best possible Government support, within the framework of our defence, security and foreign policies. This includes the following activities:

the bringing together of overseas customers and UK suppliers;

the co-ordination of industrial sales activities to provide an integrated national approach to markets;

the administration of Government to Government defence contracts;

the development, with industry of a five year strategic plan which identifies key markets and the priority campaigns within these markets;

the disposal of surplus MOD equipment;

the provision of professional military assistance in support of defence exports;

the organisation and hosting of visits to the UK by senior Government and military personnel from overseas;

the provision of advice on export project finance;

the co-ordination of MOD advice to DTI on export licence applications.

Unlike DESO, the Export Opportunities (Defence and Security) Service, EO(DS)S, is a commercial venture operated by the Defence Manufacturers Association and the Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers. Consequently, its activities do not fall within the responsibility of the MOD. However, I understand that EO(DS)S, which has been established with the support of the Department of Trade and Industry under the Sector Challenge Scheme, has a narrower role to that of DESO. It is principally concerned with the establishment of a system for the collation and dissemination of up to date market intelligence information to British industry.

While the EO(DS)S has only recently been established, the MOD will support any initiative which is aimed at assisting the British Defence industry within the framework of our defence, security and foreign policy objectives.

Hospitality

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list planned expenditure on hospitality for April and May, indicating the date, location and purpose of each event. [35115]

Dr. Reid: Major events planned for April and May, attended by Ministers and funded by my Department are:

Date	*Location*	*Purpose*	*Cost (£)*
21 April	Edinburgh	3/4 Power Armament Directors Dinner	2,000
27 April	London	Visit by Norwegian Defence College	4,500

It is not, however, possible to provide a comprehensive estimate for total expenditure on Ministerial hospitality as the majority of events and meetings will not be finalised until nearer the time.

Newsletters

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current security classifications of the newsletters produced for the staff of *(a)* the RAF Police, *(b)* the Royal Naval Regulating Branch and *(c)* the Royal Marines Police; how often each newsletter is produced; and when each newsletter was first produced. [35362]

Mr. Spellar: The RAF Police produce two publications, both of which are unclassified. The *Provost Parade* magazine is published twice per year and has been in circulation continually since 1947. The Provost

Marshal (RAF)'s Standards Unit (PMSU) Bulletin is published quarterly and has been in circulation since 1990.

The regulating Branch Newsletter is published three times per year, is unclassified and first appeared in 1987. The Royal Marines Police do not publish a Service Police newsletter.

Ordnance Disposal School

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he received the report of the study on the possible relocation of the Ordnance Disposal School at Chattendon to the Horseshoe Barracks or an adjacent site in Shoeburyness; and when he plans to make a decision on the report. [37703]

Dr. Reid: The report is yet to be completed. I expect it to be complete and to be able to announce a decision on its recommendations before the summer recess.

Force Research Unit

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many officers and soldiers were attached to the Force Research Unit; [37814]

(2) what was the annual cost of *(a)* the Force Research Unit and *(b)* its replacement in each year of their operation. [37813]

Dr. Reid: I am withholding this information under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Brian Nelson

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to the Exchequer in each year of his Department's financial arrangements with Mr. Brian Nelson. [37816]

Dr. Reid: I am withholding this information under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on access to Government Information.

NATO

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to make available further information on NATO and NATO enlargement. [38711]

Mr. George Robertson: The Government have undertaken to provide time for debates in both Houses on the proposed accession to NATO of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland before they ratify the accession protocols, which have today been laid before the House together with explanatory memoranda. The Government have as always co-operated fully with the Defence Select Committee in its inquiry on NATO enlargement and given it access to appropriate documents. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a statement on 9 July 1997 on the outcome of the Madrid NATO Summit and the Government have regularly responded to questions on this topic. In addition, a briefing note on the studies of the costs of NATO enlargement was placed in the Library of the House last month, and I am pleased to announce that today the Ministry of Defence has published documents and information on NATO and NATO enlargement on its World Wide Web site at http:/.www.mod.uk.

Correspondence

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that he and his Ministers personally read the letters sent to them by hon. Members on constituency matters. [27668]

Mr. Spellar: It has been the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Ministers to read personally, letters from hon. Members on constituency matters. Where, however, the matter is the responsibility of a Chief Executive of a Defence Agency, the letters are transferred to him to reply to the hon. Member.

Hon. Members, nevertheless, retain the right at any time to ask for a Minister to deal with the correspondence.

Devonport

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the budget for the refurbishment of facilities at Devonport; and if he estimates the work will be completed within budget. [30568]

Dr. Reid: The contracted target price range for the provision of refitting and refuelling facilities for nuclear submarines at Devonport is £335 million-£359 million. The figures relate both to the refurbishment of existing facilities and the provision of new facilities for Trident submarines. Under the terms of the contract Devonport Management Limited (DML) is incentivised to keep the costs as low as possible. The project is not due to complete until early next century, but there is no reasons to suppose that it will not be completed within budget.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest assessment of the possible causes of Gulf War syndrome. [36278]

Dr. Reid *[pursuant to his reply, 6 April 1998, c. 48]:* It has been brought to my notice that one sentence, relating to the further epidemiological study funded by the US Department of Defense, was ambiguous and open to misinterpretation. For convenience the full text of the answer, appropriately amended, is set out below.

Since returning from the Gulf War in 1991, some UK veterans have become ill. Many believe that this ill-health is unusual and directly related to their participation in that conflict. However, there is still no medical or scientific consensus on this subject and important research is still in progress.

The Government are funding two major epidemiological studies to investigate the health of Gulf veterans and their families. A further epidemiological study into UK Gulf veterans is being funded by the US Department of Defense. In addition, the Government are funding a programme of clinical tests on a group of randomly selected Gulf veterans and also a research programme to investigate the possible adverse health effects of the combination of vaccines and tablets which were given to British troops in the Gulf to protect them against the threat of biological and chemical warfare.

It would be premature to speculate on the possible causes of Gulf veterans' illnesses before the results of these research programmes become available. We currently expect that preliminary results from some of these studies will appear during 1999.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of radioactively-contaminated land there are on sites and bases owned or operated by his Department *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* abroad; if he will list the sites; what is being done to restore the land; and what is his estimate of the cost. [37837]

Mr. Spellar: The information required to provide the lists requested is not available. However, my Department is undertaking a programme of Land Quality Assessments (LQA) across the Defence Estate to identify contaminated land, including radioactively contaminated land. Priority is given to sites identified or being considered for disposal and sites in environmentally sensitive areas where a known threat of potential contamination exists, or is strongly suspected. Initial results from these surveys indicate that few MOD sites are affected by radioactive contamination but only some of the highest priority sites have been assessed to date.

Where radioactive contamination is identified in a LQA, the need for clean up and remediation is determined, taking into account the future use of the site, on a case by case basis. The steps required to remediate a site will depend upon the circumstances, but in all cases such work is carried out in accordance with relevant legislation. Contaminated material arising from the remediation procedure is subsequently disposed of in accordance with letters of agreement issued by the environment agencies.

Storm Shadow Missiles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *261*, on Storm Shadow missiles, how many are to be procured; what proportion of the related work will be carried out in UK based facilities; and if the costs of aircraft integrated are included in the estimated programme cost. [35356]

Mr. Spellar: The quality of Storm Shadow missiles being procured is currently classified and I am therefore, withholding this information under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I have, however, asked for this position to be reviewed, and will write to the hon. Member when that review is complete. The cost of integration on Tornado and Harrier is included in the total Storm Shadow programme cost. The cost of integration on Eurofighter is included within the overall Eurofighter programme costs. The proportion of Storm Shadow related work that will be carried out in UK based facilities is equivalent to some 80 per cent. of the total contract value.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Air Safety

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of safety recommendations made over the past 10 years by his Department's Air Accidents Investigation Branch have led to changes to requirements relating to *(a)* procedures and *(b)* design. [37856]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The majority of AAIB recommendations are addressed to the Civil Aviation Authority. Although the CAA are required to report whether or not they accept a recommendation, they do not record centrally the extent to which a recommendation leads to a change in requirements. The information requested could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many United Kingdom-registered aircraft were inspected by the Federal Aviation Administration whilst in the United States of America; which airlines were involved; and what defects were found in the last year for which figures are available. [37922]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are not generally informed of FAA inspections on UK registered aircraft.

I understand that the FAA are required to carry out a minimum of one ramp check on each foreign airline operating to the US.

They are not under any obligation to inform the CAA of ramp checks carried out on UK registered aircraft, but may do so if a ramp check raises a particular issue. The CAA do not hold a central record of any such approaches from the FAA.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of safety recommendations made over the past 10 years by his Department's Air Accidents Investigation Branch have been accepted by the Civil Aviation Authority. [37855]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Since 1990 the CAA has produced an Annual Progress Report to the Secretary of State on the status and progress of its responses to the Recommendations made to the Authority by the AAIB. These reports are also published and copies are available in the House of Commons library. The figures from the latest progress report are set out.

		Acceptance			*Current status*	
	Total	*Full*	*Partial*	*Not accepted*	*Open*	*Closed*
1990–95	713	533(75%)	57	123	14	699
1995	41	28 (68%)	8	5	6	35
1996	40	25 (62%)	12	3	15	25
Total	794	586 (74%)	77	131	35	759

Note:
Recommendations that are still 'Open' for further action include those requiring long term investigation or research.

Piracy

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures are available *(a)* to British seafarers to protect themselves against piracy and *(b)* to the Government to protect seafarers against piracy; and what plans he has for further measures. [38329]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Advice to seafarers on how to protect themselves against acts of piracy is available from:

The Piracy and Armed Robbery Merchant Shipping Notice (No. 1517) which is being revised and re-issued shortly. This gives practical advice on how to deter and deal with acts of piracy and armed robbery and will be widely disseminated throughout the industry and to seafarers.

The Marine Safety Agency's Code of Safe Working practices for Merchant Seamen which is also being revised and re-issued and includes counter piracy advice.

Information on piracy incidents is now made widely available to seafarers so that they may take appropriate counter measures and the FCO includes incident information in Travel Advice Notices.

The Government have always considered the best and most sensible way to combat the problem is through concerted international action through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and we will be supporting any appropriate counter piracy initiatives that are put forward there.

We have agreed to contribute financially to a series of counter piracy seminars being organised by the IMO; and are considering whether we might be able to send experts to problem areas overseas to offer advice.

The Government share the concerns of the shipping industry and seafarers and accept that piracy is a problem, particularly in some areas of the world where attacks continue and British ships and seamen are at risk. I raised this concern at the Ministerial Conference on Port State Control held in Vancouver at the end of last month and was supported by the delegates from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, the European Commission, Norway, New Zealand, Canada and the IMO.

Environmental Decision Making

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason the UK delegation to the 10th session of the negotiations for a UN Economic Commission for Europe Convention concerning public participation in environmental decision making, held in Geneva on 3 to 6 March, did not support provisions giving the same rights for the public to participate in decisions relating to GMOs as for other proposed environmental activities; and if he will make a statement. [37249]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* The Government are committed to a policy of increased transparency and enhanced public participation in decision making in relation to the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms and, as such, supported the inclusion of a provision applying the requirements of the Convention in this context. Our current legislation has such provisions. The drafting of the Convention provision was the subject of considerable debate during the negotiations and the UK was concerned, particularly in view of our role as EU Presidency, to secure a workable provision which provides a basis for further development. For that reason, we support a proposal for the first meeting of the Convention Parties to develop the application of the Convention in this field, taking into account work under the Convention on Biological Diversity to develop a protocol on biosafety, in which the United Kingdom is playing a leading role. The provisions of the Convention will be taken into account when the EU revises its own Directive on deliberate releases to the environment later this year.

We do not, however, consider that public participation is practical in all decisions on contained use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). There are estimated to be 20,000 contained use activities underway in GB, in about 450 notified premises. The vast majority of these (estimated to be about 95 per cent.) employ non-pathogenic organisms, such as disabled bacteria or yeasts. The remaining 5 per cent involve work with potentially harmful organisms, such as genetically modified pathogens, and work with these must all be notified to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Contained use activities are typically small scale (often in volumes of 100–200 millilitres) and short lived (research projects are often of between 6 months and 3 years duration). These activities are highly controlled and contained using tried and tested methods. The Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 1992 require that physical barriers, supplemented as necessary with biological and chemical barriers, are used to limit the contact of GMOs with the environment and the general population.

Although it would be disproportionately cumbersome to the scale, nature and large number of contained use activities to include them in the Convention, it is clearly important that information be available to the public. In addition to requiring the HSE to keep a public register of information relating to notifications of proposed activities, the legislation also has provision for disclosure of information by HSE when requested to do so.

Regional Development Agencies

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many organisations have been approached to submit nominations to the regional development agencies; if he will list them; and how the nominations will be dealt with. [37533]

Mr. Caborn: Nominations for Regional Development Agency boards have been sought from over 1500 organisations. All applications received will now be considered in accordance with the guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly with a full list of these organisations.

Jet Skis

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what safety regulations apply to the use of jet skis. [37376]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Jet Ski is a trade name for one of a variety of personal watercraft (PWC). There are no safety regulations which apply to the use of personal watercraft but consideration is being given to the results of consultation on ways in which the safety of such craft

and other non-regulated pleasure vessels can be improved. A decision on the way forward will be made in the next few months. At the International Boatshow in January, I helped to launch the Royal Yachting Association's (RYA) Personal Watercraft User Training Initiative. The Scheme aims to encourage more users to undertake training courses run by the RYA and to raise awareness of safety issues.

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what representations *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority have received from the Kent Fire Service regarding proposals to replace fire crews from Kent by crews from Eurotunnel at the Channel Tunnel; [37709]

(2) if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority have been consulted by Eurotunnel regarding its proposal to replace fire crews from the Kent Fire Brigade with Eurotunnel fire crews at the Channel Tunnel; and if he will make a statement; [37707]

(3) if he will place in the Library copies of the correspondence between Eurotunnel and the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority relating to the replacement of Kent Fire Brigade crews by Eurotunnel fire crews at the Channel Tunnel. [37708]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No proposal has been received from Eurotunnel to replace fire crews from the Kent Fire Brigade with Eurotunnel fire crews at the Channel Tunnel. If such a proposal is made, it will be considered by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority who will advise the Intergovernmental Commission. Any such correspondence between the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority and Eurotunnel is covered by Clause 33.3 of the Channel Tunnel Concession Agreement of 1986.

Eurotunnel has employed a consultant, Dawsons International, to assist in conducting a review of the staffing of the First Line of Response (FLOR) teams. We understand Eurotunnel has given notice of termination to the current providers of its FLOR personnel—Kent Fire Brigade and the Sapeurs Pompiers of Calais—as a precautionary contractual measure which would take effect only if the results of the study into the staffing of FLOR teams conclude that it would be better to have directly employed labour.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *261*, on what basis clause 33.3 was initially included in the Channel Tunnel Treaty. [38154]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This clause was originally included in the 1986 Channel Tunnel Concession Agreement, at the request of the Concessionaires, to protect commercially sensitive material.

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what discussions his Department has had with Central Railways about the possible construction of a freight line from the Midlands to the Channel Tunnel; [38105]

(2) what representations his Department has had from Central Railways about the possible construction of a freight line from the Midlands to the Channel Tunnel. [38106]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have received a number of representations from Central Railways about this scheme. My officials have had one recent meeting with the promoters, who wished to discuss wider transport policy issues. There was no substantive discussion of Central Railways' plans.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that the renegotiation of the Channel Tunnel rail link to London includes a requirement for a continuous fast and direct through-link to Stratford, St. Pancras and the West Coast main line for both passengers and freight, and that the complete link is built as one project. [37678]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *295–96*, in which my right hon. Friend made it clear that the Government require the whole of the rail link to be built. Any revised proposals from London and Continental Railways and Railtrack must establish an incentive to ensure this.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Stratford Station and Subsidiary Works) Order which was approved in principle by the House last year, seeks to enable direct services between the West Coast main line and Stratford and the Channel Tunnel. Following the public inquiry, the Inspector's Report is currently with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Subject to my right hon. Friend's decision concerning the making of that Order, the provision of those services would be a commercial matter for Eurostar (UK) Ltd, a subsidiary of London and Continental Railways.

Local Authority Notices

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many local authority section 19B notices he has lifted since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement on the lifting of such notices. [37780]

Mr. Raynsford: None. Individual applications to vary or revoke directions given under Section 19B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 will be considered on their merit, principally their contribution to providing competitive local services.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much public money was spent per head of population in each county on *(a)* public transport and *(b)* road repairs in (i) 1996 and (ii) 1997. [37785]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is not available in the format requested. I will write to the right hon. Member and provide available data.

Motor Vehicle Registration Fee

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the legislative base for the £25 registration fee which is to be paid on the first registration of a motor vehicle as from 1 April. [37803]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Section 21(3) of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 (inserted by section 19, Schedule 4, paragraph 33, of the Finance Act 1995).

Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to bring roads which do not have 40 mph or less speed limits within the provisions of the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. [38325]

Angela Eagle: We have no plans to bring roads which have a speed limit of more than 40mph within the provisions of the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996.

London Underground

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the budget for London Underground's current radio advertising campaign. [37857]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that they are currently running a Family Travelcard promotion on the radio, the total cost of which is £80,780.

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of whether the total cost of the proposed arrangements for the funding of London Underground set out in his oral statement of 20 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1539–42, will be greater or less than the cost of continuing public support. [38143]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We believe that our proposal for a public-private partnership will offer better value for money than continued reliance on public sector funding, and will mean that London Underground's investment needs will be addressed more quickly, and at less cost to the public purse, than would otherwise be possible. The need for ongoing subsidy, if any, will be established only when bids have been received and evaluated.

Audit Commission

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the accuracy of information supplied by local authorities to the Audit Commission; and if he will make a statement. [38112]

Mr. Raynsford: It is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that information provided to the Audit Commission is reliable. In publishing local authority performance indicators, the Audit Commission have to rely on this information. We have no reason to doubt the accuracy of this information in the majority of cases. Indeed, more is done to confirm that the systems in place for collecting this information are sufficiently robust than for many other nationally available sources of information.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to undertake a fundamental review of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38311]

Ms Armstrong: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Secretaries of State for Health and Wales have agreed to set up today a financial management and policy review of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales, as part of a programme of reviews of non-departmental public bodies.

The review will be conducted in two stages. The first will be a "prior options" study focusing on whether the functions carried out by the Audit Commission are needed and, if so, whether those functions are best undertaken by the Audit Commission or some other body. Subject to the outcome of this first stage, the second stage will consist of a more detailed review of the Audit Commission's structure, funding, financial management and methods of operation.

I have appointed Paul McQuail, a retired senior civil servant in the former Department of the Environment, to lead a small team to undertake the prior options study. To oversee the review, I am establishing an Advisory Group, on which we are inviting representatives from the Audit Commission and the health and local government sectors to join representatives from central Government.

In carrying out the study it is intended that the review team will consult with a wide range of interested parties and would welcome written representations from anyone who has views on the Audit Commission and its work.

Brown-field and Green-field Sites

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what definition his Department uses of *(a)* brown field and *(b)* green field sites. [37876]

Mr. Raynsford: There is, as yet, no specific definition of 'brown field' land, but it is usually taken to mean land previously developed for urban uses, as defined for the Department's Land Use Change Statistics. These uses include residential, transport and utilities, industry and commerce, community services, previously developed vacant land and derelict land. There is also no specific definition of 'green field' land. However, it is usually interpreted as 'land not previously developed'. This includes the Land Use Change 'rural uses' categories, such as agriculture, forestry, open land, water, minerals and landfill, outdoor recreation, defence together with vacant land in urban areas that was not previously developed.

On 23 February the Government published *Planning for the Communities of the Future*, which contains their main proposals for how household growth should be managed through the planning system. The document committed the Government to the publication of a discussion paper on regional recycling targets, which will also look at 'brownfield/greenfield' definitional issues, before a draft revised PPG3 is issued for consultation in the summer.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the cost of decontaminating brown-field land will be met where such land is made available for housebuilding. [38386]

Angela Eagle: The cost of decontaminating brownfield land made available for housebuilding is borne by the developer in the overall costs of the development. However, it is common for the costs relating to the decontamination to have been taken into consideration in the price paid for the land.

In some circumstances, developers or purchasers of land may be able to secure assistance with the cost of decontaminating brownfield land through English Partnerships or their equivalents in Wales and Scotland. In 1997–98, the English Partnerships Investment Fund supported schemes to reclaim and/or service 1,800 hectares of vacant, derelict and contaminated land.

Rail Subsidies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each of the next five years the Government subsidy to be paid to *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* each train operating company. [37919]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Railtrack receives no subsidy direct from the Government. Subsidy to the railway is paid to train operating companies. The table provides details of payments which the Government plan to make to, and receive from, each train operating company for the five years 1998–99—2002–03, at February 1997 prices.

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Anglia Railways	26.0	22.1	15.0	13.0	8.6
Cardiff Railways	18.1	17.1	15.8	15.0	14.3
Central Trains	122.9	109.0	103.4	99.9	96.9
Virgin Cross Country	95.1	82.2	73.9	67.8	50.5
Gatwick Express	–7.9	–9.8	–10.7	–11.5	–12.0
Great Eastern	14.0	8.1	2.8	–0.3	–5.1
Great Western Trains	53.9	47.8	41.4	34.0	27.3
Great North Eastern Railway	36.3	16.5	5.2	2.0	0.1
Virgin West Coast	68.4	56.1	53.7	52.3	–3.9
Island Line	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.0	—
LTS Rail	25.1	23.4	21.9	20.6	19.3
Merseyrail Electrics	6.5	5.9	5.7	5.4	5.5
Midland Main Line	2.4	0.9	–0.8	–2.6	–4.4
Connex South Central	54.8	46.9	43.4	38.3	35.9
Silverlink	35.5	29.5	26.4	23.0	20.0
North Western Trains	89.8	81.6	74.9	71.7	69.0
Regional Railways North East	122.9	109.5	102.3	97.3	93.7
Scotrail Railways	—	—	—	—	—
Wales & West Railway	120.5	114.0	106.9	100.3	95.2
South West Trains	62.2	57.4	51.4	47.5	44.0
Thames Trains	60.8	55.7	50.5	45.2	35.7
Thameslink Rail	24.8	17.0	13.5	7.6	3.8
Chiltern Railway	–8.7	–16.2	–22.5	–23.2	–27.0
Connex South Eastern	12.8	9.9	5.7	4.7	3.3
West Anglia Great Northern	85.1	61.1	49.1	40.4	32.6
Total	34.7	25.4	13.1	4.3	–14.6
Total with gross PTE costs	1,162.7	973.0	847.0	753.4	588.9
Total with net PTE costs	1,575.7	1,352.3	1,203.3	1,092.0	915.2

Counterfeit Aircraft Parts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *696*, how many counterfeit parts have been found on foreign-registered aircraft operating to or from the United Kingdom in the last five years. [37920]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We do not hold this information. It is the responsibility of the State of Registry of an aircraft to ensure that only approved parts are used on it.

Aircraft Inspections

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of ramp checks undertaken on *(a)* United Kingdom-registered aircraft and *(b)* foreign-registered aircraft by the Civil Aviation Authority, indicating the airlines involved and the defects found in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [37921]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer to my answer of 26 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns *325–26*. Since then a ramp check has been carried out on an aircraft from each of the following foreign airlines: Biman, Ghana Airways, Azerbaijan Airlines and Uzbekistan Airlines.

In the 12 months to the end of March 1998 the CAA carried out 75 ramp checks on UK aircraft from the following operators:

Aeromega
Air Hanson
Alan Mann
Bristows
British Airways

British Midland Airways
Burman
Cabair
Castle Air
Cheqair
Coventry Heli Centre
Easyjet
Elite Helicopters
Fast Helicopters
Flightline
Gill Aviation
Grampian
Hi-line
Hecray
Isle of Scilly Skybus
Looporder
Lynton
Manx
Monarch
National Grid
Newquay Air
Oxford Air Services
PLM Dollar
Sabre
Sloane Helis
Solent Helicopters
Southernair
Sterling
Veritair
Virgin Atlantic
Yorks Heli Centre.

Unlike the targeted ramp checks on foreign operators, ramp checks on UK operators are part of the normal oversight process and take place on a random basis. The defects found as a result of these ramp checks could be listed only at disproportionate cost.

Motorcycle Licences

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will increase the time allowed for provisional motorcycle licence holders to pass their test, in respect of women who become pregnant before the expiry of the one year time limit. [37975]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Provisional motorcycle licences are issued with a two year validity period. A licence holder who has not passed the motorcycle test by the end of that period cannot obtain a replacement provisional motorcycle licence within the following 12 months. If there are medical or other reasons why a person would wish to suspend their learner rider status, such as pregnancy, the licence can be returned to the Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency, so as to preserve the remainder of the validity period.

Footways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the disability organisations which will be consulted as part of the review of guidance to local authorities on the designation of footways as shared use facilities. [37826]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* We expect to consult formally with our statutory advisers the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee along with the Joint Committee on Mobility for Partially Sighted and Blind People as well as the Joint Committee on Mobility for Disabled People.

Views will also be sought from local authorities and groups representing pedestrians and cyclists. Comments will be welcomed from all interested parties. The review process is just beginning, and detailed consultations are unlikely to be initiated before the end of this year.

Millennium Dome

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much contaminated soil has been removed from the Millennium Dome site; to which site it was moved; and what consultations took place prior to its removal. [38126]

Angela Eagle: Around 200,000 tonnes of contaminated soil from the area of the Greenwich Peninsula which is to be leased to the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has been disposed of off-site.

Contaminated soil which cannot be reused on site is disposed of at licensed landfill sites. The contractors employed by English Partnerships operating under a duty of care in the waste handling chain, are responsible for selecting the location of the landfill sites and a number of different sites have been used.

The disposal of soils which cannot be used on-site is part of the overall remediation strategy discussed and approved by both the Environment Agency and the London Borough of Greenwich, and is consistent with Government policy.

New Housing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *543*, if he will lay down mandatory minimum useable floor areas for houses and flats. [38225]

Mr. Raynsford: I have no plans to do so.

Bus Employees Superannuation Trust

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) of 20 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *462*, what action he proposes to take following receipt of advice from Counsel in respect of the Statement of Claim brought by the Trustee of the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust against his Department; when he proposes to take action; and if he will make a statement. [38072]

Ms Glenda Jackson: After consideration by Ministers of the advice received from Counsel, and all the relevant background, my Department will be responding to the Statement of Claim in the near future.

This is consistent with our hope that all outstanding legal matters concerning the former National Bus Company pension funds are satisfactorily resolved as soon as possible.

Noise

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations are in place for limiting noise levels in public places with particular reference to places of entertainment. [38175]

Angela Eagle: Whilst there is no legislation setting specific noise limits for audience exposure to loud sound, employers and self employed persons are required under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that their business activities do not expose persons not in their employment to risks to their health and safety. This would include protection against risk of damage to their hearing.

MOT Certificates

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the procedures followed when a complaint is received alleging that a garage is issuing MoT certificates illegally; [38117]

(2) what surveillance techniques are used in investigating garages suspected of irregularities in issuing MoT test certificates; and what training surveillance operatives receive. [38118]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency, Mr. Ron Oliver, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 8 April 1998

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about procedures followed in cases of complaints alleging that garages are issuing MOT certificates illegally; and what surveillance techniques are used to investigate garages suspected of irregularities in issuing MOT certificates and what training surveillance operatives receive.

In cases where complaints are of a sufficiently detailed nature, the Inspectorate will investigate and take appropriate enforcement action against an MOT testing station. Police or Trading Standards Officers may also be involved in some cases, particularly if deception in vehicle sales is suspected. In other cases, complaints are used to target our advisory /counselling or enforcement activities. These can include a visit from a Vehicle Examiner to examine documentation or an incognito test in which a Vehicle Examiner submits a vehicle for test as a member of the public and observes the test to ensure that the correct standards are applied.

In cases where there is suspicion of irregularities, MOT testing stations may be observed from areas of public access or from surrounding premises to monitor vehicle movement and activities. The results of observations are compared with the issue of MOT certificates. The observation of vehicle movement at non-testing premises may also be linked to certificates issued from MOT testing stations. Staff involved in surveillance receive 'off the job' training on the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and 'on the job' training involving mentoring and sharing of best practice from managers and colleagues.

The Inspectorate carries out continuous reviews of procedures for maintaining security arrangements for MOT documentation. These have included improvements in design and printing techniques to make forgery more difficult and the introduction of a stolen test certificate hotline. Reducing the market for stolen and forged test certificates is one of the objectives of the Inspectorate's MOT computerisation project which involves setting up a computer network linking all MOT testing stations (some 18,500) with a central database containing details of every vehicle tested under the MOT scheme. The project is in its early stages and is anticipated to go live in the early years of the next decade.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will propose measures to the EU Environment Council to reduce waste incineration to the same extent as the agreed reductions in landfill; and if he will make a statement. [38326]

Angela Eagle: No, I will not. The European Commission is responsible for proposing European legislation; and while Member States can encourage it to bring forward particular measures, we have no intention of doing so for a measure along the lines suggested by the hon. Member. A significant increase in capacity for incineration with energy recovery is likely to be necessary both to move towards a more sustainable waste management system and to meet the requirements of the draft landfill directive. However, we have made it clear that incineration with energy recovery needs to be considered within a framework that favours waste minimisation and recycling.

The hon. Member may wish to be aware that the European Commission is currently working up a proposal for a new draft directive on emissions from waste incineration. It will replace the existing directives on incineration of municipal waste, with which full compliance has been achieved in England and Wales, and is likely to cover a broad range of other incineration plant. We support the need for strict emission standards for incinerations and welcome the consideration being given by the Commission to detailed issues.

Motorway Service Station (Solihull)

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on planning application No. 98/0259 in respect of a proposed motorway service station at Ravenshaw in Solihull. [37942]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A planning application for a motorway service area (MSA) at Junction 5 of the M42 at Ravenshaw has been submitted to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The Highways Agency has been consulted and has requested a traffic impact assessment so that it can consider the effect of the proposal on the operation and safety of the motorway. This is the second recent planning application for a new MSA in this area but, whatever the merits of the individual sites, no more than one signposted MSA would be permitted on this stretch of the M42.

Planning for Communities

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he has had with regional bodies regarding his Department's proposals on Planning for Communities. [38385]

Mr. Raynsford: In drawing up the proposals set out in the policy document "Planning for the Communities of the Future" the Department had regard to the responses to

the Green Paper issued by the previous Administration on "Household Growth: Where Shall We Live?". These included responses from several of the regional planning conferences.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of his Department's proposals on Planning for Communities on counties where the structure plan has already been settled. [38387]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*.

Recycled Land Task Force

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the membership of the taskforce, headed by Lord Rogers of Riverside, set up to look at the use of recycled land; and if he will make a statement on *(a)* its powers and *(b)* the relationship between the task force and (i) regional development agencies, (ii) Government regional offices, (iii) SERPLAN and (iv) county structure plans. [38388]

Mr. Caborn: The membership of the Task Force is currently being finalised. It will incorporate members with a range of backgrounds, including local authorities, the planning, architectural and development professions, interest groups and others with an interest in making the best use of previously developed land. The Task Force will be an advisory body, taking forward its objectives as set out in "Planning for the Communities of the Future". The role of the Government Offices for the Regions, SERPLAN and county structure plans, and the future role of Regional Development Agencies, will not be affected, although I hope that the work of the Task Force will assist these bodies in carrying out their responsibilities.

Cyclist Accidents

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many pedal cyclists aged *(a)* 0 to 15, *(b)* 16 to 59 and *(c)* 60 years and above have been (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in accidents involving (1) cars, (2) goods vehicles, (3) other cyclists and (4) motorcycles in each of the last available five years. [38542]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Pedal cyclist casualties by vehicle type involved[1] in accident, severity and age
GB: 1992–1996

Year	0–15 Fatal	0–15 Serious	16–59 Fatal	16–59 Serious	60 & over Fatal	60 & over Serious	All ages[2] Fatal	All ages[2] Serious
Pedal cycle casualties in accidents involving a car								
1992	35	934	65	1,649	23	221	123	2,832
1993	29	895	48	1,567	29	195	107	2,694
1994	29	1,001	35	1,683	25	206	90	2,936
1995	34	1,002	63	1,690	26	196	123	2,913
1996	32	991	56	1,579	21	195	109	2,796
Pedal cycle casualties in accidents involving a goods vehicle[3]								
1992	10	96	35	254	16	36	61	397
1993	7	85	40	225	11	30	58	343
1994	9	76	43	243	11	36	64	357
1995	7	96	33	206	12	35	52	342
1996	14	78	38	232	9	28	61	343
Pedal cycle casualties in accidents involving other cyclists								
1992	0	27	5	63	0	4	5	94
1993	3	17	1	64	0	4	4	86
1994	1	25	5	56	0	9	6	91
1995	4	31	4	48	1	4	9	83
1996	1	31	3	38	1	5	5	74
Pedal cycle casualties in accidents involving TWMV[4]								
1992	2	24	1	39	3	5	6	70
1993	2	26	3	45	0	8	5	80
1994	0	22	0	52	1	5	1	80
1995	3	25	3	38	2	3	8	68
1996	0	27	1	16	0	4	1	47

[1] These categories are not mutually exclusive
[2] Includes age not reported
[3] Includes LGV and HGV
[4] Two wheeled motor vehicle (Mopeds, motor scooters and motorcycles including combinations)

Pedestrian Accidents

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many pedestrians aged *(a)* 0 to 15, *(b)* 16 to 59 and *(c)* 60 years and above have been (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in accidents involving (1) cars, (2) goods vehicles, (3) cyclists and (4) motorcycles in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [38541]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is shown in the following table. Only those pedestrians hit by the specified vehicle are included; other pedestrian casualties in the accident are excluded.

Pedestrian casualties hit by vehicle type, severity and age: GB: 1992–1996

Year	0–15 Fatal	0–15 Serious	16–59 Fatal	16–59 Serious	60 and over Fatal	60 and over Serious	All ages[1] Fatal	All ages[1] Serious
Pedestrian casualties hit by a car								
1992	146	4,181	360	4,170	491	2,255	1,000	10,741
1993	121	3,587	326	3,758	431	2,091	880	9,558
1994	122	3,999	311	3,828	381	2,026	822	9,989
1995	107	3,810	271	3,732	379	1,866	763	9,547
1996	108	3,560	297	3,571	331	1,745	740	9,008
Pedestrian casualties hit by a goods[2] vehicle								
1992	16	306	77	467	110	250	204	1,034
1993	20	241	80	358	125	221	225	836
1994	19	254	78	375	95	218	192	872
1995	12	221	74	330	63	191	150	754
1996	16	226	64	319	63	147	145	702
Pedestrian casualties hit by pedal cyclists								
1992	0	16	0	30	3	37	3	85
1993	0	28	1	31	3	42	4	104
1994	2	19	0	40	2	36	4	100
1995	0	21	0	30	4	47	4	100
1996	1	27	0	32	1	30	2	90
Pedestrian casualties hit by a TMMV[3]								
1992	8	119	11	234	32	142	51	504
1993	4	101	11	194	37	122	53	436
1994	6	90	8	184	26	116	41	410
1995	5	102	7	159	33	100	45	372
1996	2	76	11	164	28	77	41	329

[1] Includes age not reported
[2] Includes LGV and HGV
[3] Two wheeled motor vehicle (mopeds, motor scooters and motorcycles including combinations).

Rate and Rent Arrears

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the figures for arrears to date in London boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark in respect of *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* community charge, *(c)* council tax and *(d)* rents; and what are the average figures for Inner London boroughs. [38237]

Mr. Raynsford: Information on outstanding arrears with respect to domestic rates is not available.

Information on community charge and cumulative council tax arrears for local authorities is not collected centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) regularly publish estimates for individual authorities. The information shown is provisional and relates to the position at 31 March 1997, and will be available in their Revenue Collection Statistics 1996–97 publication which is expected to be available from May 1998.

The information on rent arrears is based on information provided by the London boroughs on their Housing Subsidy Claim returns.

Average figures on community charge and council tax arrears for Inner London boroughs are not available as information has not been received from all inner London boroughs.

	Community charge[1] £000	Council tax[1] £000	Rent arrears Cumulative[1] £000	Rent arrears As a percentage of rent roll for 1996/97
Hackney	2,080	27,395	35,087	30.1
Islington	n/a	n/a	16,854	15.6
Lambeth	54,314	41,426	30,186	26.0
Southwark	24,608	13,508	23,500	16.7
Total Inner London	n/a	n/a	[2]163,913	[2]15.4

[1] Comparisons of amounts of arrears can be misleading as authorities' figures reflect decisions about when to write off arrears, and the amounts of debts debited.
[2] It would not be meaningful to attempt to provide an average rent arrears figures for the Inner London boroughs. We have instead provided the total cumulative rent arrears for all the Inner London boroughs, together with this figure expressed as a percentage of their rent roll.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the annual rates of sickness absence for employees of the London boroughs of (i) Hackney, (ii) Islington, (iii) Lambeth and (iv) Southwark in each of the years 1990 to 1997; and what were the average figures for Inner London boroughs for each of these years. [38238]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is not available centrally.

Tesco Planning Application

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons the Government Office for the South West issued an article 14 (General Development Procedure) Order in respect of the Tesco supermarket site application in Tetbury, Gloucestershire (Ref No. CT. 0547/3/R); and what timescale is envisaged for determining this order. [38320]

Mr. Caborn: An article 14 directive was issued in order to allow the Secretary of State time to consider whether the application should be referred to him for his determination and to prevent permission being granted until he has done so. No timescale has been set but the decision will be taken as quickly as possible.

Anthrax (King's Cross Station)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the presence of anthrax spores in King's Cross station, with particular reference to the implications for the proposed redevelopment of the building as part of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. [38444]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Anthrax spores were found in the loft spaces over certain office buildings at King's Cross station in 1992. Railtrack undertake biannual airborne sampling tests at the station to monitor the situation and have introduced suitable safety procedures for contractors working in those areas affected. The latest tests in March 1998 found no anthrax spores present at the station. There is no planned redevelopment of King's Cross station as part of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link project.

Recycling

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to encourage the growth of United Kingdom recycling industries. [37936]

Angela Eagle: There is already a national recycling industry, based around 100 Material Recycling Facilities and a large number of reprocessors for glass, metal, plastics and paper.

The Government are committed to an increased level of recycling and are therefore keen to see an expansion of this industry.

We have introduced a number of measures to achieve this.

- an increase in the higher rate of landfill tax from £7 per tonne to £10 per tonne from April 1999;
- a review of the Packaging Regulations, to ensure that they meet their objective of doubling the recycling and recovery of packaging waste by 2001;
- publication of guidance to local authorities on revising and updating their recycling plans.

We have initiated discussions with representatives of local authorities, the waste management industry, reprocessors, manufacturers and trade associations to ascertain what further measures can be taken by both industry and Government to increase recycling.

We and colleagues in the DTI are examining the progress of the Producer Responsibility initiatives in end of life vehicles, newspapers, electrical and electronic goods, tyres, and batteries and the extent to which this initiative might be extended. Most of these sectors are also the subject of proposed EC legislation.

We shall review the waste strategy for England and Wales. A consultation paper is to be issued shortly. One of the main elements for the new strategy will be an examination of how we can improve our national performance on recycling.

Other drives will have a positive effect on the recycling industry in the longer term. As well as the continuing effect of the packaging legislation, these include: further guidance my Department will be issuing to local authorities on good practice later this year, and consideration by local authorities of joint municipal waste strategies with neighbouring authorities.

Rural Public Transport

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of the assistance to public transport in rural areas announced in the Budget will be allocated to *(a)* the providers of bus services and *(b)* the operators of rail services. [38563]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Budget included provision for an additional £50 million a year across the UK for rural public transport. There is no specific provision for the operators of rail services. £45 million will be used to support additional bus services in rural areas. The rest will be made available for community-based transport schemes. Criteria will be developed to ensure a fair and comparable distribution process, and to make sure the money gets to where it is most needed.

Rights of Way (Disabled Access)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken *(a)* to preserve existing rights of way which are suitable for use by the disabled and *(b)* to increase the number of rights of way accessible to the disabled. [38565]

Angela Eagle: My Department, through the Countryside Commission, supports the valuable work of the Fieldfare Trust in promoting access to the countryside. The rights of way network is one means by which everyone can enjoy the countryside. We commend the recently published *BT Countryside for All Good Practice Guide* which contains standards and guidelines on access to the countryside which take disabled people's needs into account. Local authorities, which have statutory responsibilities for rights of way, should make themselves aware of the *Guide*. They should also be aware of their duties and responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Underground Workers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what safety regulations are enforced by borough councils to protect council workers working underground, in *(a)* sewers *(b)* and other confined spaces. [38450]

Angela Eagle: The Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive to protect council workers in these workplaces.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for a re-evaluation of the risk calculations that underpin the current discharge authorisations at Sellafield. [38427]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency are currently considering an application to vary the discharge authorisations at Sellafield. The Agency will carry out an evaluation of risk as part of their consideration of the application.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he intends to take on the application for new discharge authorisations from Sellafield. [38582]

Angela Eagle: A number of requests have been made for the Secretary of State to call this application in for his own determination. These requests are under consideration.

Multi-screen Cinemas

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce the outcome of the public inquiry held in early 1997 regarding proposed multi-screen cinema developments in Sunderland. [38584]

Mr. Raynsford: Progress is being made in considering the Inspector's report. However, some of the issues are complex and there has been a significant amount of post-inquiry correspondence which needs careful examination. A decision will be issued as soon as this process is completed.

Polling Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ask the Audit Commission to make access to polling stations for the disabled a local authority performance indicator. [38343]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are discussing with the Audit Commission how local authority performance indicators might be developed. We shall ensure that access for disabled persons to polling stations is included in those discussions. As required under the Local Government Act 1992, the Commission will consult widely on its proposals in the summer.

Limestone Pavement

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions for destruction of limestone pavement there have been in each of the past five years. [38394]

Angela Eagle: I am not aware of any prosecutions.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list by location the number of limestone pavement orders. [38392]

Angela Eagle: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to strengthen protection of limestone pavements. [38393]

Angela Eagle: We are presently considering ways of improving the protection and management of our special sites. There is likely to be consultation later this year.

Photocopier Emissions

Mr. Kemp: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to assess the possible effects upon users of continued exposure to *(a)* ozone emissions and *(b)* hazardous chemicals and pollutants produced by office (i) photocopiers and (ii) laser printers; and if he will commission research into the effects of long-term exposure to photocopiers and laser printers. [38567]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has recently reviewed in detail the scientific evidence on potential health effects of occupational exposure to ozone. The evidence was presented to the Working group on the Assessment of Toxic Chemicals (WATCH) committee, a tripartite committee of experts in occupational health, in 1995.

WATCH agreed that the lead health effect of ozone is irritation of the upper respiratory tract. Based on the results of studies in human volunteers, WATCH recommended that an Occupational Exposure Standard (OES) of 0.2 ppm (15-minute reference period) should be established in the UK for ozone. This recommendation was endorsed by ACTS (Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances). Thus, within the UK there is now an OES for ozone of 0.2 ppm (15-min reference period).

In relation to exposure to ozone from photocopier machines, short-term (i.e transient) exposures of far below 0.1 ppm occur in normal circumstances. At these levels there is no risk of development of any health effects in office workers in the vicinity of photocopier machines. However, if there is inadequate general ventilation, it has been estimated that exposures up to 0.5 ppm can occur. As long as photocopiers are situated in locations which have adequate general ventilation, ozone concentrations will remain far below the level at which there might be any risk of irritation in office workers.

HSE has issued guidance on ozone (EH38 revised, published 1996), which indicates that working with photocopy and laser printer machines is a low risk activity. As long as there is adequate general ventilation, there will be no risks to health from emissions of substances from these machines.

Photocopy toners are fine powders which have a faint plastic odour. There is an extensive body of experimental research results from studies conducted at a number of laboratories throughout the world, into the potential health effects of a range of 16 different commercial photocopy toners. This research has been evaluated within HSE. This evaluation indicates that photocopy toner dusts are lacking in any specific toxic properties.

Occupational exposure to photocopy toner dusts has been assessed by HSE. This report indicated that even under worst-case scenario conditions (a print-shop operator working continuously for 8-hours and carrying

out two maintenance procedures during that time), the total exposure to respirable photocopy toner dust would only be 0.0014 mg/m3 (the term "respirable" indicates the airborne fraction which is capable of reaching the lungs).

Overall, it can be concluded that working in close proximity to photocopy machines including carrying out maintenance procedures involving changing toner cartridges etc, will carry no risks of lung damage or other effects on human health in relation to the inhalation of toner dust.

As with other forms of electrical machinery, frequent use generates heat. Thus, photocopy machines should be kept in well ventilated areas as a common sense precaution to prevent the build up of heat which might lead to discomfort in workers in close proximity to such machines.

Emissions from laser-printers are anticipated to be similar to those from photocopy machines, and hence the information provided above should be of relevance in this regard.

British Transport Police

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to amend the jurisdiction of the British Transport Police in respect of matters outside their immediate operating areas; [38419]

(2) what assessment he has made of the status of the British Transport Police following the privatisation of the railways; [38421]

(3) if he will review the powers of members of the British Transport Police when they are dealing with emergencies outside their immediate operating areas; [38420]

(4) what assessment he had made of proposals to establish a police authority for British Transport Police and for that authority to be the employer of British Transport Police officers and civilian support staff; [38422]

(5) what are the Government's plans for the future of the British Transport Police. [38424]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A working group including officials from my Department, the Home Office, the British Transport Police (BTP) and the British Railways Board has been looking into these issues. I expect the group to complete its work and make recommendations to ministers shortly. The Home Office are about to undertake a consultation process with police staff associations on a limited extension of the BTP's jurisdiction.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons existing rail operators require a Police Service Agreement with British Transport Police in order to obtain a licence; and for what reasons no similar requirement is made of new operators. [38423]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Rail Regulator is not authorised to grant, without the approval of the Secretary of State, any licence (other than a network licence) which does not contain a condition requiring the licence holder to enter into an agreement approved by the Secretary of State with the British Transport Police for the provision to the licence holder of core police services.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the *(a)* effectiveness and *(b)* operational costs of the administration of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997. [38543]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency in England and Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland have a duty to monitor business compliance with the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 ("the Regulations") and ensure that businesses have satisfactorily discharged their recovery and recycling obligations. The monitoring of the Regulations will be an ongoing process.

A Compliance Cost Assessment (CCA) on the effects of the Regulations on business was included in the Consultation paper on the draft Regulations which was issued by the former Department of the Environment, in July 1996. A review of the Regulations is now underway and is to be finalised around the end of May when the Advisory Committee on Packaging will submit their recommendation to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment. A regulatory appraisal (formerly CCA) will accompany any proposals for amendment.

Environment Agency

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government will review the legislation relating to the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency as recommended by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. [38774]

Mr. Meacher: I am today setting in hand a review, jointly with the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It will examine the legislation relating to the Environment Agency in England and Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, with a view to identifying any barriers preventing the Agencies from taking an integrated approach to the environment. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recommended in its nineteenth report (Cm 3165) that such a review should be carried out within three years of the Agencies' taking up their functions, in April 1996.

The terms of reference of the review are:

To investigate the possible rationalisation of the regulatory mechanisms which the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency operate, and the opportunities for integrating regulatory regimes which currently operate on a similar basis but under different legislation, so as:

- to identify any significant barriers to integration within each of the Agencies, whose removal would improve the quality of regulation by producing worthwhile improvements in environmental protection and enhancement, customer service and business efficiency,
- to establish whether such barriers could be overcome by administrative means or management action by the Agencies; and
- insofar as this is not the case, to recommend legislative changes to enable them to be removed.

The review is not intended to consider the integration of the philosophical approaches underlying the different regulatory regimes, which are often bound up with European Union legislation. Nor is the review considering integration of the Agencies themselves.

The review will be carried out by the relevant Government Departments and the Agencies. Interested bodies will be invited to contribute their views at an early stage. We envisage that the review will take about a year to complete.

Any legislative changes in England and Wales arising out of the review would be considered by Parliament. Since the results of the review will be submitted around the time of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, it would fall to Scottish Ministers to consider whether to put corresponding proposals to the Scottish Parliament.

Private Hire Vehicles

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about London taxi fares and fees. [38778]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made an Order increasing London taxi fares by 3.67 per cent. on average with effect from Saturday 25 April 1997. The new tariff will incorporate a minimum charge of £1.40 (including a hire charge of £1.00) for the first 462 metres (505.4 yards) or 102 seconds. The rate will then be 20p for every 231 metres (252.7 yards) or 51 seconds until the fare exceeds £9.40 and 20p for each 154 metres (168.5 yards) or 34 seconds thereafter.

The Secretary of State has also approved an increase in the London taxi driver licence fee for £87.00 to £103 (for a three year licence). There will be no increase this year in the fee for a London taxi vehicle licence which has stood at £78 since 1992.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to issue a revised circular on planning and affordable housing; and if he will make a statement. [38755]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has today issued Circular 6/98: Planning and Affordable Housing, which replaces Circular 13/96. The Circular is intended to provide a clearer framework for preparing plan policies on affordable housing. It should help local planning authorities adopt a more consistent, plan-based approach, which will facilitate speedier and more effective negotiations and decisions on planning applications involving affordable housing.

The Government wish to optimise the contribution that the planning system can make to the overall supply of affordable housing. However, they also want to ensure that affordable housing policies in development plans are consistent with Government guidance and that they are consistently applied.

The new Circular lowers and further revises the existing thresholds, confirms a preference for providing affordable housing as part of the proposed development, and clarifies further the use of financial contributions in lieu of on-site provision. It also clarifies that the policy in the Circular applies to all types of new housing proposals.

The Circular revises the existing threshold arrangements so that local planning authorities should only seek an element of affordable housing in:

(a) housing developments of 25 or more dwellings or residential site of 1 hectare or more, irrespective of the number of dwellings; and

(b) in Inner London, in housing developments of 15 or more dwellings, or to residential sites of 0.5 hectare or more, irrespective of the number of dwellings.

In settlements in rural areas with a population of 3,000 or fewer, the local planning authority should adopt appropriate thresholds. The new arrangements also provide, in exceptional circumstances, for local planning authorities in those areas where the higher threshold at (a) would apply to seek to adopt a lower threshold, through the local plan process. These threshold arrangements should be based on assessments which include local needs and available supply of land for housing, and adopted only through the local plan process.

Where a local planning authority has not yet adopted its local plan or UDP it will have to have regard to Circular 6/98 in preparing its plan. However, PPG1 makes it clear that where development plans are very close to adoption at the time that new information (including guidance) becomes available, it may be preferable to adopt the plan and then start an immediate review. Therefore, in cases where plans are close to adoption (for example where a modifications stage has already been held and no further modifications on other issues are proposed by the local authority), it may be appropriate, in order to prevent further delay, for the local planning authority to adopt its plan and to prepare proposals for early alterations to the plan having regard to the policy guidance in Circular 6/98.

Local planning authorities should prepare such proposals for alterations expeditiously and agree timetables for alteration with the Government Office for the Region. In cases where local planning authorities fail to take such action promptly, the Secretary of State may well consider it appropriate to direct them to prepare alterations to their adopted development plans within a specified period.

All local planning authorities will have to take into account the policy guidance in the new Circular in determining application for planning permission.

The Government will monitor the implementation of the affordable housing policy and intend to incorporate the advice in the new Circular in the future revision of PPG3: Housing.

Single Vehicle Approval

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the arrangements for single vehicle approval due to come into effect on 1 May will be modified; and if he will make a statement. [38916]

Dr. Strang: I am laying regulations today that will amend the procedures for importing cars and light goods vehicles that have not been built (type approved) to

British or European standards. The new measures, which modify those already in place, will ensure that safety and environmental standards appropriate for use in Britain are met.

The changes start to take effect from 1 May 1998. The main points are:

Safety and environmental standards appropriate to British conditions will be determined by an inspection of the vehicle's design and construction prior to first registration in Britain—"Single Vehicle Approval" (SVA).

The current definition of "personal import" will remain for the time being—ie where

(a) the vehicle has been purchased outside the United Kingdom for the personal use of the individual importing it or his dependants;

(b) the vehicle has been so used by that individual or his dependants on roads outside the UK before it is imported;

(c) the vehicle is intended solely for such personal use in the UK, and

(d) the individual importing the vehicle intends to remain in the UK for not less than twelve months from the time when application is made for a first licence for the vehicle under the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994.

Vehicles up to 3 years old that are personally imported by individuals will have to pass the SVA test before they can be registered. There will be a 2 month transitional period during which individuals who have made arrangements to import vehicles under the existing personal import conditions may continue to do so.

Manufacturers and independent dealers will be able to import and sell cars and light goods vehicles from outside Europe up to a cumulative maximum total of 50 examples of any one model in any one year. In such cases, vehicles up to 10 years old will be subject to SVA.

I will consult on options for future arrangements for vehicle imports under the SVA scheme, in particular the question of numbers. This will be undertaken by 1 January 1999.

From 1 May 1998, SVA will recognise overseas approvals if they are broadly equivalent to SVA requirements.

Any motor caravan or ambulance may be imported by anyone and will not have to undergo SVA, although such vehicles (and any other light passenger car or light goods vehicle) may be volunteered for inspection. Similarly, the scheme will, from 1 May, be available to manufacturers of vehicles constructed using parts from a previously registered vehicle.

Vehicles kept by members of Visiting Forces will be exempt from SVA; they will undergo comparable inspections by the Visiting Force.

Cars that have been type-approved in Europe are not affected by these measures, nor is any vehicle that has been licensed and registered before 1 July 1998.

SVA will apply to amateur-built vehicles registered on or after 1 July 1998.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Freedom of Information

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to publish the Freedom of Information Bill; and what factors underlie the length of time taken over its preparation. [38123]

Dr. David Clark: I expect to publish a draft Bill later in the year, which will continue the consultation process started with the White Paper "Your Right to Know". In the light of comments on this, a Bill will be introduced into Parliament as soon as the legislative timetable permits.

The consultation period on the White paper formally ended on 28 February, although a significant number of responses came in after this date. I am now considering the main points arising from the consultation, and how we should best take account of them in preparing the draft Bill. Naturally, the exercise has added time to the overall process, however I strongly believe that it is time well spent, since consultation is vital if we are to develop legislation which is to make a genuine and lasting contribution to opening up government.

Market Testing

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the new guidance on market testing and contracting out will be published. [38304]

Dr. David Clark: In the early summer.

Prior Options Review

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the options which will be included in the prior options review of Government agencies. [38308]

Dr. David Clark: During the prior options reviews of their Next Steps agencies and agency candidates, departments must thoroughly examine the case for abolition; privatisation; contracting-out; market testing; rationalisation or merger with other areas of government; and agency or NDPB status. All of these options are available and there is no presupposition that any outcome is more favoured than another. The decision on future status is made with the aim of achieving the most appropriate and cost effective way of carrying out the functions so as to deliver best value for money and best service.

WALES

Steel Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for the steel industry in Wales. [36462]

Mr. Hain: The British Steel industry as a whole, like other parts of the manufacturing sector, is affected by the current strength of sterling. However, the Welsh steel industry, which is among the most competitive in the world is well placed to take advantage of the stable business environment which is being created by current Government policies aimed at securing low inflation and sound public finances. I am confident that it will continue to make a major contribution to the Welsh economy through exports and the provision of quality jobs.

Road Surfaces

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of road surface have been laid with *(a)* whisper concrete and *(b)* porous asphalt since 18 May 1997. [37030]

Mr. Hain: Nearly 14 miles of porous asphalt has been laid in Wales in the last five years although none since 18 May 1997.

A contract for the first "whisper concrete" carriageway has been let, to be 7.5 miles in length, which will start to be laid next month.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many complaints his Department has received relating to landfill sites in the last three years, separately identifying those relating to health hazards. [37058]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Complaints relating to landfill sites over the last three years have been received by a number of Welsh Office Divisions. Some of these have raised concerns relating to health issues. It is not possible to identify all these representations or those which specifically raise health issues.

In the light of recent representations concerning the Nantygwyddon landfill site, my ministerial colleagues and I are considering commissioning research on levels of ill-health around landfill sites in the UK. Officials are currently considering the scientific feasibility of such a study.

Suicides (Farmers)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers in Wales have committed suicide in the last five years. [37457]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The number of cases among farm owners and managers registered with the Office for National Statistics as occurring in the last five calendar years was:

1993: 11
1994: 12
1995: 7
1996: 5
1997: 6 (provisional).

Information Technology

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money is being provided by his Department to improve IT facilities for businesses in rural areas. [37373]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is not readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Rural Transport

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the Government intend to spend on improving public transport facilities in rural areas of Wales during the next year. [37371]

Mr. Hain: Local authorities have powers to promote public transport using the resources allocated to them. The level of support, which is a matter for local authorities, is currently running at around £18 million per annum, much of which will benefit rural areas. In addition, the Government will continue to support the provision of passenger rail services in rural areas. They have also set a budget for 1998–99 of £125,000 for the Rural Transport Innovation Grant scheme, and some £2.5 million will be made available for improved rural transport as part of the rural transport package announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to improve rural transport services; and if he will make a statement. [38128]

Mr. Hain: The Government are developing an integrated transport policy which will reflect our election Manifesto commitment to protect transport services in rural areas. The policy will be set out in a UK White Paper to be published later in the spring, together with a complementary transport policy statement for Wales. In line with the development of this policy, an additional £2.5 million is to be made available in 1998–99 for improved rural transport services in Wales, as part of the rural transport package announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement of 17 March.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken to encourage the provision of bus services in rural Wales, with particular reference to Flintshire; and if he will make a statement. [38460]

Mr. Hain: Local authorities have the powers to subsidise socially necessary bus services out of the resources allocated to them. In addition, some £2.25 million will be made available in 1998–99 to improve rural bus services in Wales, including Flintshire, as part of the Bus Partnership Fund announced in the Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Substance Misuse (Gwynedd)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much Government money was spent in Gwynedd on substance misuse services and prevention in each of the last three years. [37788]

Mr. Win Griffiths: North Wales Health Authority spent £392,000(i) in 1995/96, £440,000 in 1996/97 and £468,000 in 1997/98 on substance misuse services in the area of Gwynedd unitary authority.

£142,000 was spent by Gwynedd County Council on alcohol or drug misuse in 1995/96, £25,000 by Gwynedd Unitary Authority in 1996/97 and the latest budget information suggests that the authority will have spent £64,000 on drug or alcohol misuse in 1997/98.

This excludes indirect Government expenditure on substance misuse services in Gwynedd. The Welsh Drug and Alcohol Unit for example, which is funded by the Welsh Office, provides practical and administrative support throughout Wales to those involved in combating drug and alcohol misuse. The Welsh Office also provides grant funding to organisations such as Cyngor Alcohol Information Services which is based in Conwy but provides a range of information, counselling, residential and treatment services for persons in North Wales experiencing alcohol and drug related harm.

Notes

(i) Estimate due to boundary changes.

Structural Funds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take, (i) on a European level and (ii) on a UK level to protect the current levels of entitlement to structural fund moneys in Wales under the current review of those funds. [37834]

Mr. Hain: On 26 March I met with Commissioner Wulf Mathies in London, and strongly recommended that the Commission consider the Welsh case for retaining structural fund support post-1999. I am confident that the Commissioner appreciates the strength of our case, and that we are committed to obtaining a fair deal for Wales.

Welsh Office officials are closely involved in all aspects of the review and policy formulation, and form part of the UK delegation involved in detailed negotiations in Brussels. They are committed to ensuring that Wales continues to secure the maximum benefit from the funds after 1999.

Road Safety

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he has taken to enhance road safety in Wales. [38133]

Mr. Hain: The Government are developing a road safety strategy for Wales which will work in conjunction with the integrated transport policy.

Later this year, new road casualty reduction targets will be set for 2010. Specific measures and initiatives towards achieving the new target will be in the following broad policy areas:

vehicle safety

drink-drive

safety engineering

speed management

walking and cycling strategy

driver training and testing

enforcement

road safety education and publicity.

A550

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to reduce traffic congestion on the A550 at its intersection with roads at the English border; and if he will make a statement. [38131]

Mr. Hain: Maintenance activities are currently planned to minimise traffic congestion. The use of overnight and off-peak working whenever possible together with an embargo on all but essential works during Bank and school holiday periods ensures that full road capacity is available for peak flows. Future proposals include the provision of enhanced driver information and traffic management systems with longer term proposals for capacity enhancement improvements at critical points on the network. These proposals are being assessed as part of the ongoing review of the Welsh trunk road programme. Details of the strategy for and role of the programme will be included in the report on the roads review to be published later this year.

Inward Investment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of inward investment for the year 1997. [38288]

Mr. Hain: For the 1997–98 financial year the Welsh Development Agency has recorded 128 inward investment projects which forecast 13,842 new and safeguarded jobs and capital investment of over £695 million.

EU Funds

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of European Union funds which would be lost to Alyn and Deeside in the event of the loss of Objective 2 Status. [38289]

Mr. Hain: Alyn and Deeside does not currently meet the eligibility criteria for Objective 2 or 5(b) funding. There will therefore be no financial loss to the area under the new Objective 2 criteria post-1999.

Traffic Calming

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the provision of traffic calming measures in Wales. [38132]

Mr. Hain: A number of traffic calming trials have been implemented on the Trunk Road Network and the results will be available later this year. The results will allow decisions to be made on the implementation of traffic calming elsewhere on the network.

We place strong emphasis on making residential areas safer for children and want traffic to adapt to the needs of all vulnerable road users. We are promoting a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists by encouraging, where appropriate, traffic calming schemes, 20 mph zones, safer routes to schools and alternatives to the car.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of council house sales receipts he has assumed for 1998–99 in Alyn and Deeside; and if he will make a statement. [38292]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The level of council house sales receipts has been estimated at £14 million, net of discount to tenants, in 1998–99 for Wales. For the purpose of estimating the requirement for Housing Revenue Account Subsidy in Wales, it has been assumed that Flintshire will receive £0.4 million, net of discount, in 1998–99.

Travellers' Children

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local education authorities in Wales who applied for support to educate mobile children under section 488 of the Education Act 1996 indicating the amount granted for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [38059]

Mr. Hain: Details of the local education authorities in Wales which applied for funding under the section 488 grant scheme for the education of travellers'

children—including those from the Showman's Guild—and the amount of grant awarded in 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99, are shown in the following table:

Local education grant funding in Wales between 1996–98 and 1998–99

£

Authority	Grant awarded 1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Methyr Tydfil/Bridgend	7,613	4,268	4,268
Torfaen/Blaenau Gwent	21,400	21,900	21,900
Cardiff	51,000	52,200	52,200
Pembrokeshire	14,687	15,032	15,032
Neath Port Talbot	17,000	17,400	17,400
Swansea	17,000	17,400	17,400
Wrexham/Denbighshire/Conwy/ Flintshire	21,300	21,800	21,800
Gwynedd	—	0	—
Rhondda Cynon Taff	—	—	0
Total	150,000	150,000	150,000

In the case of the three joint projects shown above, grant is paid to Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen and Wrexham as co-ordinating authorities.

Public Bodies (Female Appointments)

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to increase the number of female appointments to public bodies in Wales. [38838]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have taken a strong policy line on the appointment of women in Wales. I have set a goal of increasing the proportion of women in public appointments to over 30 per cent. by the year 2001. I have put new procedures for public appointments based on open competition and appointment on merit in place.

General practice is that appointments are now advertised publicly and widely, nominations are accepted from a variety of sources such as self nominations, professional and representative associations. I have personally ensured that all shortlists for appointments for which I am responsible include women candidates.

My Department is developing a programme with representative organisations to increase the pool of good candidates from a variety of backgrounds. As part of this programme my Department has developed proposals for innovative public appointment pilot projects. I will be making an announcement about the detail of these pilot projects in June.

Alongside of this my Department is constantly seeking ways to improve the public appointments process and to raise awareness with different representative groups of women. Greater media cover both in newspapers and the radio have already been put into place, and presentations being given to key audiences.

My policy is already seeing results with a 2 per cent. increase of women in appointments from 26 per cent. to 28 per cent. since last year.

Drugs Initiatives

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the costs of *(a)* anti-drugs education initiatives and *(b)* other drugs reduction initiatives in each of the past 14 years; and what are the expected costs of similar campaigns in each of the next five years. [38359]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on expenditure on anti-drugs education and other drug reduction initiatives in each of the past 14 years is not held centrally. Similarly, the costs of any similar campaigns in each of the next five years are unlikely to be available from a central source.

In 1997–98 the Department spent £1 million on combating drug and alcohol misuse, £500,000 of which was used to operate the Welsh Drug and Alcohol Unit, £100,000 to support Drug and Alcohol Action Teams and the remainder was used towards other drug and alcohol initiatives.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what anti-drugs education campaigns in Wales in the last 10 years resulted in a measurable reduction in drug use; how many people were involved; and over what period they were undertaken. [38360]

Mr. Win Griffiths: This information is not available in the form requested. However, there is evidence that anti-drugs education campaigns are effective in reducing drug misuse. For example, positive results in delaying the onset of illegal drug use were demonstrated in "Project Charlie" (Home Office report). this used multi-faceted interventions which addressed knowledge, skills and attitudes within the context of a range of background factors such as price, availability, peer pressure, curiosity, incomes, unemployment, life events etc.

In Wales we are now implementing a more multi-faceted campaign strategy which does not propose one message or concentrate on one drug. Rather, using the Strategic Prevention Action Plan launched in November and being implemented from April 1998, the campaign focuses on different target groups in a multitude of settings and incorporating the following new approaches:

- exploring relevant and appropriate messages for young people concerning health, social, legal and environmental risks;
- using up-to-date and bilingual materials which have been designed and field-tested to reflect local concerns and issues;
- proposing and supporting interventions for those who are considered 'at risk'.

Medicinal Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths of people aged over 60 years have resulted from *(a)* over-medication, *(b)* suicide and *(c)* other misuse of medicinal drugs in each of the past 10 years. [38353]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Drug-related Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths in each of the past nine years in Wales resulted from the use of *(a)* heroin, *(b)* temazepam, *(c)* cocaine/crack, *(d)* LSD, *(e)* solvents, *(f)* amphetamines, *(g)* ecstasy, *(h)* paracetamol, *(i)* co-proxamol, *(j)* khat, *(k)* alcohol, *(l)* tobacco and *(m)* cannabis. [38356]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The following table, compiled by the Office for National Statistics, shows for each of the listed substances, the number of deaths of Welsh residents occurring annually from 1993. Comparable data for earlier years could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Deaths to residents of Wales, 1993–96

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
(a) Heroin[1]	1	1	1	3
Alone	1	1	0	3
With other drugs	0	0	1	0
(b) Temazapam[1]	4	8	10	6
Alone	3	5	2	3
With other drugs	1	3	8	3
(c) Cocaine/crack[1]	0	0	0	0
(d) LSD[1]	0	0	0	0
(e) Solvents[2]	6	1	1	n/a
(f) Amphetamines[1]	1	0	1	2
Alone	0	0	1	0
With other drugs	1	0	0	2
(g) Ecstasy[1]	0	2	0	1
Alone	—	0	0	1
With other drugs	—	2	0	0
(h) Paracetamol[1,3]	5	19	37	21
Alone	6	7	9	7
With other drugs	9	12	28	14
(i) Co-Proxamol[1,3]	5	0	5	3
Alone	4	0	4	2
With other drugs	1	0	1	1
(j) Khat[1]	0	0	0	0
(k) Alcohol[4]	240	244	289	294
(l) Tobacco[5]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(m) Cannabis[1]	1	2	0	1
Alone	0	0	0	0
With other drugs	1	2	0	1

[1] Number of deaths where the substance was mentioned on the death certificate. Where, for example, both heroin and cannabis are mentioned on a death certificate, the death will occur twice in the table, once under 'Heroin with other drugs' and once under 'Cannabis with other drugs'.

[2] Data are supplied by St. George's Hospital Medical School and are those deaths involving all volatile substances, including solvents.

[3] Paracetamol is one of the ingredients in co-proxamol. When ONS quantifies deaths from paracetamol, they include deaths where co-proxamol and other paracetamol compounds are mentioned on the death certificate under 'paracetamol with other drugs'. Hence this method is used here and deaths attributed to co-proxamol are also included under 'paracetamol with other drugs'.

[4] Deaths certified as due to alcoholic psychoses, alcohol dependence syndrome, non-dependent abuse of alcohol, alcoholic cardiomyopathy, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, and toxic effects of alcohol.

[5] The Health Education Authority estimates the number of deaths of people in the UK as a result of their own smoking in 1988 as 110,000 and in 1995 as 120,000. No sub-national breakdowns are available.

Local Enterprise Agencies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many enterprise councils there are in Wales; what estimate he has made of the number of jobs they have (i) created and (ii) secured; and if he will make a statement. [38459]

Mr. Hain: There are 19 approved local enterprise agencies in Wales. The Welsh Office does not hold information on the number of jobs they have helped create or safeguard. However a recent report from Wales Enterprise Ltd. indicated that in 1996–97 the enterprise agencies had:

assisted over 2,200 new businesses to start up;

provided over 26,000 counselling sessions to firms; and

helped over 3,000 enterprises with the development of business plans.

The enterprise agencies in Wales are important partners within Business Connect, and as the above figures illustrate, play a very useful role in supporting new and established businesses.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to visit Meirionnydd Nant Conwy; and if he will make a statement. [38451]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have no diary commitments in Meirionnydd Nant Conwy at the moment.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Millennium Experience

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) of 24 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *204*, *(a)* what undertakings were given to the four founding partners in return for their agreement to be sponsors and *(b)* what further sponsors have been confirmed since 24 February. [37517]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 9 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *59*. Further sponsors will be confirmed by the New Millennium Experience Company in due course.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what areas of the design of the large scale figure for the Millennium Experience have been finalised with particular reference to *(a)* its load bearing qualities, *(b)* emergency exits, *(c)* point of entry and *(d)* the provision of lavatory facilities. [31194]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) will ensure that thorough and detailed calculations are made of the load bearing capacity of the large scale figure in the Body Zone. Load bearing capacity, entry and exit points, ventilation and visitor flow requirements are being fully taken into account as the design develops. Lavatory facilities will be situated in core service areas throughout the Dome.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make the housing being built on and around the Millennium Experience site available initially for the accommodation of visitors to the Experience. [31351]

Mr. Mandelson: There are no plans to make the housing being built on the Greenwich peninsula available for those visiting the Millennium Experience. However, there will be a number of options for those visitors requiring accommodation. London First has been working to ensure that 10,000 extra beds will be available in London by 2000. There are a number of hotels within

easy reach of the Millennium Experience and a bed-and-breakfast scheme is also being organised by Greenwich Council.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what consultations he has undertaken with *(a)* the Royal Society and *(b)* the British Academy on the content of the Millennium Experience. [34790]

Mr. Mandelson: No formal consultations have taken place with either body, though I am in regular touch with the Prime Minister's Chief Scientific Adviser on the content of the Experience.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has for the use of the Welsh language in the Millennium Dome. [35131]

Mr. Mandelson: There will be many opportunities to explore the rich diversity of the culture of all parts of the United Kingdom, including Wales, both within the Dome and through the UK wide Challenge programme of events and activities.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the role of *(a)* photography, *(b)* art, *(c)* popular music, *(d)* radio and *(e)* television in displays in the Millennium Experience. [35212]

Mr. Mandelson: The variety, scope and nature of the individual exhibits, and of the themes they will reflect, offer opportunities for a wide range of electronic, art and other media to play a role in the Millennium Experience.

Millennium Dome (Covering)

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the arrangements for seeking a new supplier for the covering of the Millennium Dome; when the previous contractor was informed of his failure; and what assessment he has made of the degree of compliance with the provisions of the EU regulations on tendering. [37692]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The original competitive tendering process, in accordance with domestic and EU public procurement requirements, invited bids for both PVC and PTFE. Following the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) review of its options, after the letting of the PVC contract, both Koch Hightex's and Birdair's bids for PTFE were considered and both companies were given the opportunity to reconsider their original tender price. The NMEC acted according to EU requirements throughout.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if the original contract for the covering of the Millennium Dome is still valid. [37693]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The original contract for a PVC roof covering has been terminated by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) in accordance with the terms of that contract.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if the new contractor for the covering of the Millennium Dome is on schedule with his work. [37688]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Birdair, the company putting the roof covering on the Dome, is due to complete its work by early summer. This is on schedule.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on levels of sickness in respect of workers involved in the construction of the Millennium Dome at Greenwich. [37993]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 6 April 1998, *Official Report,* column *78.*

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

High Court Judges, Birmingham

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were tried by High Court judges in Birmingham in 1997; and how many such cases over-ran the time allocated by the Listing Department. [37935]

Mr. Hoon: High Court judges sitting at Birmingham Crown Court heard 163 guilty pleas and 73 trials during 1997. Time estimates are agreed between the judge and the parties. Figures on the number of those cases over-running are not collated and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Official Entertainment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many receptions have been held in his Department since he took office; how many people have attended; and what was the total cost of these events. [25145]

Mr. Hoon: Since 1 May 1997, Ministers in the Lord Chancellor's Department have hosted four receptions. These events were attended by 924 people at a cost of £12,029.20.

Of this sum £10,638.94 was spent on an annual event which was attended by 830 people and which the serving Lord Chancellor hosts as head of the judiciary. The figure for the previous year was £10,099,26.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Balkan States

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visits to *(a)* Serbia, *(b)* Macedonia and *(c)* Albania; what assessment he made of the Albanian government's cooperation with the IMF and World Bank; and what representations he made regarding the treatment of Albanians in Kosovo and the Albanian minority in Macedonia. [31960]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I visited *(a)* the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 1–2 February, where I met FRY Foreign Minister Jovanovic and the Montenegrin President Djukanovic; *(b)* the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 2–4 February, where I met President Gligorov, Prime Minister Crvenkovski, Foreign Minister Handziski and opposition leaders, and chaired an EU Political Dialogue meeting with the FYROM

Government; and *(c)* Albania on 4–5 February, where I held meetings with Prime Minister Nano, Foreign Minister Milo and the opposition leader Dr. Berisha.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited the FRY on 5 March in his capacity as Presidency of the EU and met FRY President Milosevic and Foreign Minister Jovanovic.

I made a further visit to the region on 11 March as EU Presidency Special Representative. I visited *(a)* the FRY where I met Serbian President Milutinovic and FRY Foreign Minister Jovanovic; *(b)* the FYROM where I again met President Gligorov, Prime Minister Crvenkovski and Foreign Minister Handziski; and *(c)* Albania where I met Foreign Minister Milo and the Minister of State at the Prime Ministry Islami.

The Albanian Government are implementing an emergency package agreed with the IMF to restructure Government finances. The pyramid schemes are being wound down under the auspices of a World Bank Trust Fund.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in his meetings in Belgrade expressed the EU's clear condemnation of the Serbian Police actions in Kosovo which had resulted in the deaths of a number of civilians, including women and children. He urged all sides in the dispute to exercise restraint and refrain from further violence. During my own visit to Belgrade on 11 March I reiterated the EU's deep concern with the situation in Kosovo. In Tirana and Skopje I listened to the concerns of the Albanian and FYROM governments and welcomed their support for a peaceful resolution of the Kosovo issue.

Hospitality

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list planned expenditure on hospitality for April and May, indicating the date, location and purpose of each event. [35119]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary hosted a Dinner for ASEM Foreign Minister at Lancaster House on 2 April at a cost of approximately £3,000. Other events planned for the next two months include lunch on 29 April for the Gulf Co-operation Council Meeting (estimated cost £1,200) and on 30 April a lunch with businessman to foster trade with Latin America (estimated cost £300). It is not, however, possible to provide a comprehensive estimate on Ministerial hospitality as the majority of events and meetings will not be finalised until nearer the time.

Military Exports

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the first annual report into military exports will be published; and what areas it will cover. [38116]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Work is in hand on an annual report on the state of the UK's strategic export controls and their application, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Diplomats' Children (Education)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for the most recent year for which figures are available, the number of pupils, whose parents/guardians are employed by the diplomatic service, attending private schools at public expense; and if he will list in order of number of pupils attending the schools involved. [37944]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: There are at present 610 children of employees of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office attending private schools in the United Kingdom at public expense in order to provide them with continuity of education. A list of the schools in question and the number of pupils attending them follows.

There are 1,005 children resident with staff who are on overseas postings. 166 of these children are in the pre-school age range of three to four years. The remaining 839 are of school age.

Overseas, staff are encouraged where possible to use the State Education System in the country where they are posted. However where there is no suitable state school these children will attend private International schools who charge fees on an annual or termly basis. Since this is a matter of parental choice at post, we are unable to provide a list of the private schools abroad with the numbers of children attending each one without incurring disproportionate cost.

List of boarding schools used by members of the Diplomatic Service—2 April 1998

ID	*School*	*Number of children*
1006	Abberley	1
383	Aberlour House	2
511	Ackworth School	1
3	Aldro	2
1036	All Hallows	2
5	Ampleforth College	10
1024	Appleford School	1
6	Ardingley College	15
8	Ashdown House School	12
9	Ashford School	4
10	Badminton School	4
14	Bearwood College	1
531	Beaudesert Park	1
15	Bedales School	5
17	Bedford High School	2
16	Bedford School	5
18	Bedgebury School	3
285	Bellerbys College Wadhurst	1
22	Benenden School	3
25	Berkhamsted School	4
26	Berkhamsted School for Girls	1
1001	Bilton Grange	2
317	Bloxham School	1
33	Bradfield College	4
38	Bromsgrove School	2
39	Bryanston School	17
40	Burgess Hill School	1
1030	Cambridge Centre for 6th Form	1
42	Canford School	1
44	Caterham School	4
45	Charterhouse School	4
432	Cheltenham College Junior School	2
49	Cheltenham Ladies College	6
1028	City of London Freemen's	1
53	Clayesmore School	4
1013	Cobham Hall	1
1040	Coleg Llanymydofri	1
1039	Cothill House	2
59	Cottesmore School	1
61	Cranleigh School	8

List of boarding schools used by members of the Diplomatic Service—2 April 1998

ID	School	Number of children
63	Cumnor House	5
64	Dauntseys School	4
65	Dean Close School	3
66	Dollar Academy	1
550	Dorset House School	2
67	Dover College	1
70	Dragon School	11
1041	Duke of Kent School	1
72	Dulwich College Preparatory School	2
71	Dulwich College	2
1027	Durham School	1
75	Eastbourne College	3
76	Edinburgh Academy	1
82	Eton College	11
1022	Falcon Manor	9
557	Farlington School	1
431	Felsted School	2
371	Feltonfleet School	2
87	Fettes College	3
90	Framlingham College	6
1033	Frensham Heights	2
334	Giggleswick School	3
95	Godstowe School	4
555	Gordons School	2
331	Gordonstoun School	1
363	Great Walstead School	1
98	Greshams School	1
437	Haileybury Junior School	1
100	Handcross Park School	2
101	Hanford School	1
103	Harrow School	2
102	Harrowgate College	2
107	Highfield School	1
108	Holmewood House School	1
1008	Holy Cross Convent	1
114	Hurstpierpoint	1
360	Hurtwood House	1
1023	Hurtwood House, Holmbury	1
118	Kent Col.	3
117	Kent College	7
556	Kimbolton School	3
119	King Edward's School	7
123	King's School (The)	22
122	Kings School	4
540	Knighton House	2
128	Lambrook School	1
129	Lancing College	2
1035	Langley School	1
417	Leighton Park	2
131	Leys School	2
283	Licen Victs School	1
1034	Lincoln Minster	2
508	Lockers Park	3
136	Lomond School	2
548	Malvern Col Junior School	3
139	Malvern Girl's College	1
140	Marlborough College	5
1038	Micheal Hall	2
147	Millfield School	9
1015	Milton Abbey	1
148	Moira House School	6
149	Monkton Combe School	4
523	More House School	3
1031	Moreton Hall	2
155	New Hall School	2
1	Not allocated	3
162	Oakham School	4
163	Oratory School (The)	6
166	Oundle School	3
168	Pangbourne College	1
1021	Parkwood School	1

List of boarding schools used by members of the Diplomatic Service—2 April 1998

ID	School	Number of children
174	Pilgrims' School	2
175	Pipers Corner School	3
178	Port Regis	9
370	Princess Helena School	1
181	Prior's Field School	4
182	Queen Anne's School	1
1042	Queen Ethelburga's College	1
184	Queenswood	4
369	Rannoch School	1
1026	Ratcliffe College	1
405	Repton Preparatory School	3
322	Rickmansworth Masonic School	1
192	Roedean School	1
197	Royal Russel School	7
198	Rugby School	3
1011	Ruthin School	1
199	Rydal School	1
349	Sandroyd School	6
204	Seaford College	2
524	Sedbergh School	2
205	Sevenoaks School	16
1032	Shebbear College	1
206	Sherborne School	6
207	Sherborne School for Girls	2
211	Sibford School	4
1043	Skegness Grammar School	1
512	St. Andrew's School	2
1017	St. Aubyns School	1
1012	St. Edward's School	2
518	St. John's-on-the-Hill	2
248	St. Mary's Hall School	1
513	St. Mary's School	8
1020	St. Teresa's	1
220	St. Bede's School	8
221	St. Catherine's School	2
222	St. Christopher School	4
226	St. Edmund's School	1
228	St. Edward's School	1
233	St. George's School	2
239	St. Lawrence College	3
241	St. Leonard's Mayfield School	5
411	St. Mary's Hall	1
251	St. Peter's School	1
254	St. Swithuns School	2
526	St. Mary's School	4
256	Stanbridge Earls School	1
259	Stonyhurst College	3
262	Strathallan School	4
264	Summer Fields School	2
267	Swanbourne House School	13
269	Temple Grove School	1
1037	The Godolphin School	1
1044	The Royal School, Surrey	1
1003	Thornton College	1
273	Tonbridge School	5
510	Tudor Hall School	2
414	Twyford School	1
413	Uppingham School	1
501	Ursuline Convent School	1
284	Vinehall School	1
552	Walhampton	2
328	Wellesley House	1
288	Wellingborough School	6
289	Wellington College	2
293	Westbourne House School	1
1045	Westminster Under School	1
297	Winchester College	4
1007	Winchester House	3
298	Windlesham House School	33
299	Wispers School	1
300	Woldingham School	5

List of boarding schools used by members of the Diplomatic Service—2 April 1998

ID	School	Number of children
302	Worth Abbey School	5
303	Wycombe Abbey School	4
1029	Wymondham College	2
534	Wycliffe College	4
Total number of schools		186

Kenya

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he made of progress towards *(a)* multi-party democracy and *(b)* protection of human rights in Kenya (i) prior to and (ii) since the Kenyan elections in 1997; and if he will make a statement. [37985]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: *(a)* Following pressure, both internal and from the UK and other donors, the Kenyan Parliament approved reforms in late 1997, which among other things allowed 26 parties to stand in the elections in December 1997. The EU statement of 6 January made the point that these elections were a further step towards greater democracy but noted that there were still shortcomings. The results are still being contested. Ten parties are represented in the new Parliament. On 2 April, the Attorney-General announced a cross-party Committee to take forward the constitutional review process. We welcome efforts to ensure that this process remains broad-based and inclusive.

(b) We receive reports from a variety of sources about human rights in Kenya. We are particularly concerned about evidence of persistent police brutality, torture and extra-judicial killings. The Kenyan Government are bound under international obligations to make progress in this respect. We will play a full part in ensuring that pressure for such progress is maintained, including ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Afghanistan

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take to raise concerns over the rights of women with the Government of Afghanistan. [38330]

Mr. Fatchett: There is no authoritative government in Afghanistan. We have urged the Afghan factions to respect human rights, particularly those of women and girls.

At our instigation, a new EU Common Position on Afghanistan was adopted on 26 January 1998. It states that the Afghan factions should end discriminatory policies and recognise, protect and promote the equal rights and dignity of men and women, including access to education and health facilities, employment outside the home, personal security and freedom from intimidation and harassment. It also ensures that support goes only to aid programmes which actively attempt to promote the equitable participation of both men and women. The EU Common Position was communicated to the Taliban and the other factions in early February.

International Criminal Court

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the procedure for reviewing prosecutions in cases where the International Court claims responsibility for determining the national location of a trial. [38314]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* The Treaty establishing the International Criminal Court is still being negotiated. There is no proposal that the Court should have the power to determine the location of trials other than those it conducts itself. We believe that the Court should have jurisdiction only in situations where national legal systems are unable or unwilling to act.

Gibraltar

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will indicate the arrangements for ministerial responsibilities in his Department for Gibraltar following the recent review of dependent territories. [38771]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his speech to the Dependent Territories Association on 4 February, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons, is the Minister in the FCO with overall responsibility for the United Kingdom Overseas Territories. As Gibraltar is the only Overseas Territory within the EU, the bulk of the work on Gibraltar will continue to be handled by the European Departments reporting directly to me. However, my noble Friend Baroness Symons will be responsible for generic Overseas Territory issues which affect Gibraltar.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy concerning the situation of Moroccan workers originally invited to Gibraltar to work for the Ministry of Defence and subsequently made redundant. [38535]

Mr. Doug Henderson: All Moroccan workers employed by the Ministry of Defence in Gibraltar and subsequently made redundant were entitled to redundancy packages on the same terms as colleagues recruited in Gibraltar itself.

EU Funds

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the criteria used in determining those projects eligible for receipt of European Communities moneys under the Kaleidoscope Project; what projects are in receipt of funds in the United Kingdom for the promotion of the concept of a common European heritage; and what part his Department plays in the determination of such. [36968]

Mr. Fisher: I have been asked to reply.

The criteria used to determine EC funding under the Kaleidoscope project are set out in the Official Journal of the European Communities, 19.8.97, C253/4–7. There is no funding under this project specifically for the

promotion of the concept of a common European heritage; Kaleidoscope supports events and cultural projects carried out in partnerships or in networks of organisations from at least three Member States involving creative work for display or performance, or intended to help or promote cultural exchanges and public access, as well as larger projects with a European dimension. A representative of my Department sits on the Kaleidoscope management committee, which co-operates with the Commission in deciding on which projects to fund.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the criteria used in determining those projects which are eligible for receipt of European Communities moneys under B3–2003, European Cultural Development Policy; what projects are in receipt of funds in the United Kingdom for raising the profile of the European Union; and what part his Department plays in the determination of such. [36967]

Mr. Fisher: I have been asked to reply.

The criteria used to determine EC funding under budget line B3–2003 are set out in the Official Journal of the European Communities, 10.1.98, C6/18–20. There are no projects under this line for raising the profile of the European Union; this funding supports cultural and artistic projects with a European dimension, projects to enhance public awareness and give wider access to the cultural heritage, European co-operation projects carried out through networks or in partnership, and European umbrella organisations active in the arts, culture and the cultural heritage. My Department plays no part in decisions under this line.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the purpose of consumer measures funded from European Communities budget line B5–100; if he will list the measures supported in the United Kingdom in 1997; and what was the role of his Department in the determination of such. [36953]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The purpose of budget line B5–100 is to fund European Commission activities which support and supplement the policy pursued by Member States to protect the health, safety and economic interests of consumers and to provide adequate information to them, in accordance with Article 129a of the Treaty. UK bodies bid for Commission funding for specific projects. We do not yet have details of projects funded in the UK in 1997. It is for the Commission to determine how to allocate funds within budget line B5–100 in accordance with Community rules.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the purpose of information and training measures for workers' organisations funded from European Communities budget line B3–4002; which United Kingdom organisations were so funded in 1997; and what was the role of his Department in the determination of such. [36954]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

Budget line B3–4002 is intended to cover information and training measures for workers' organisations in connection with the implementation of Community action on the social dimension of the internal market.

I understand from the Commission, who have sole responsibility for the allocation of funds under this EU budget line, that the only UK organisation which was funded under it in 1997 was the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the expenditure under European Communities budget line B3–1010, Youth for Europe; which organisations received funding for 1997 in the United Kingdom; what criteria determine which organisations receive awards; and what role his Department played in determining the awards. [36964]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Youth for Europe III is a European action programme which was agreed in 1995 and will run until the end of 1999. Copies of a list of the UK organisations that received funding in 1997 have been placed in the Library. In the UK, grants are awarded by the Youth Exchange Centre, the national agency for Youth for Europe III, according to published criteria. The criteria cover eligible countries, the age range of participants, group size, programme content and the duration of exchanges. The Government part-fund the Youth Exchange Centre but play no direct part in determining the awards.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the expenditure of European Communities budget line B3–1000, Preparatory Measures for Reinforcing Cooperation in the Field of Education; which organisations received funding for 1997; what is the purpose of the meeting of the Parliaments Representing the Youth of Europe; who selects the United Kingdom representatives; and what role his Department played in determining the awards. [36950]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Expenditure under B3–1000 of the General Budget of the European Union, "Preparatory measures for reinforcing co-operation in the field of education", is administered by the European Commission without reference to the EC Council of Ministers or to the Member States. One of the organisations that the Commission supports under this budget line is the European Youth Parliament (EYP). EYP currently receives an annual grant of £65,000, supplemented by private and local government sponsorship. The Government play no part in determining awards, or in the selection of participants.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the criteria used in determining what projects are eligible for receipt of European Communities moneys under the Raphael project; which projects are in receipt of funds in the United Kingdom; what part his Department plays in the determination of such projects; and how much is available for support of Europe Day in the United Kingdom. [36951]

Mr. Fisher: I have been asked to reply.

Decision No. 2228/97 established the criteria for the Raphael programme and was published in the Official Journal (OJ) of the European Communities L305/31 of 8 November 1997. The criteria for the calls for proposals for 1997 were published in OJ C219 of 18 July 1997. Two

officials from my Department represent the UK on the Raphael management committee. Projects must involve partners from two or more Member States and are selected by the European Commission, after consultations with a panel of internationally renowned independent experts. There has been no funding under Raphael for the support of Europe Day in the UK. A list of the 1997 project partnerships which have been funded and include UK partners, is as follows:

Project reference	*Brief description*
C219/01	
1.1	A workshop on the restoration and conservation of film
1.3	A workshop linked to the creation of a digital library for Greco-Byzantine manuscripts
1.4	A seminar on ancient mural painting
1.5	A conference on architectural heritage: dangers and threats
1.6	An exhibition on Viking maritime heritage
1.7	A pilot study on the cathedrals of mediaeval Europe
1.8	A network of museums of ethnography and anthropology
1.9	A conference on the origins of European ethnic groups
1.11	A research project on building crafts and construction in Northern Europe
1.13	A network of museums promoting preventive conservation
1.14	A seminar alerting young people to heritage preservation
1.20	A seminar on artisan skills on historic inland waterways
1.21	A symposium for companies working on the restoration of the architectural heritage
1.24	A project to recreate in virtual-reality form seven European parks and gardens
1.25	A research project into European military architecture
1.26	A project to put the Icelandic sagas on the World-Wide Web
1.27	A symposium on "facadism"
1.28	A workshop for young people on architectural heritage
1.30	A conference on underwater archaeology
1.31	A project on the use of information technology by museums
1.32	A project on the urban planning requirements of cultural heritage conservation
1.36	A conference on the role of culture in sustaining European cities in the future
1.37	A project on establishing an integrated approach to conserving the city of Kadista, Greece
1.39	A project to improve the quality of conservation work and the competence of conservators
1.41	A project on mining heritage
C219/02	
2.1	A project on seafaring textiles
2.3	A symposium on inventions in railways
2.4	An interactive sound experience involving museums of musical instruments
2.5	A study on the invention of automata
2.8	A project to raise awareness of the threat to European heathland
2.11	A project on tombs of the bronze and iron ages
C219/03	
3.1	A project to initiate a north/south dialogue in Europe in conservation and restoration methods
3.2	A programme to encourage historic garden specialists to consider issues of access for disabled people
3.6	A training course linked to the archaeological site of Villarejo de Salvares, Spain
3.7	A training course on the production of traditional building materials
3.9	A training programme on the inventory and documentation of the architectural heritage
3.11	A training network for professionals concerned with the cinematic heritage
3.13	A course on the use of laser technology in art conservation
3.14	A field course on the archaeological heritage of the Randor Valley, Wales
C219/04	
4.7	The restoration of the "Barco" in Italy and linked studies
4.10	The restoration of the decorated plaster façade of the palazzo, Viterbo, Italy
C219/05	
5.4	The restoration of four water mills
5.6	The restoration of a hydraulic complex at Agorregi, Spain
5.12	A project to study and conserve ancient buildings of wood

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects which received funding in the United Kingdom in 1997 under European Communities budget line B5–300, Strategic Implementing Measures; and what was the role of his Department in the determination of which projects received funding. [36959]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

This Department, along with others which have specific policy or sectoral responsibilities, contribute to discussions with the European Commission on proposals for expenditure on Internal Market measures. It is for the Commission to allocate funds within this budget line, in accordance with Community rules. The Commission does not publish a list of measures supported in individual Member States.

Electro-shock Batons

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell of 1 July 1997 concerning electro-shock batons. [28999]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

The matters to which the hon Gentleman referred in his original letter involved a number of issues which have required detailed investigation. I expect to reply shortly after Parliament reassembles following the Easter Recess.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Class Sizes

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances school standard numbers may be set on the basis of class sizes of over 30 in respect of those age ranges for which the Government have set targets for class sizes below 30. [37511]

Ms Estelle Morris: Standard numbers are set on the basis of the capacity of the school as a whole. The organisation of pupils within a school is a matter for LEAs, governors and headteachers. This may mean that a school is able to adapt to class size policy without needing a reduction in standard number. The measures we are taking in the School Standards and Framework Bill will require each Authority to produce a statement setting out how they intend to implement limits on class sizes including the need for any variation to standard numbers. The Bill also provides that in deciding a proposal to reduce the standard number at a primary school the School Organisation Committee shall have regard to any limits imposed on class sizes. It further provides for the Secretary of State to suspend for a specified period the requirement to recruit up to the standard number for the purpose of enabling any limit on class sizes to be met.

Failing Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have been designated as failing schools in the last *(a)* four and *(b)* five years, in each LEA area. [37680]

Mr. Byers: The following table lists the number of schools found to be failing by LEA area over the past 4 and 5 years to 31 March 1998. The table also shows the number of schools which have been closed or which no longer require special measures within the LEA area.

LEA	*Number of schools failing in 4 years to 31 March 1998*	*Number of schools failing in 5 years to 31 March 1998*	*Schools removed from special measures or closed*
Barking & Dagenham	0	0	0
Barnet	0	0	0
Barnsley	2	2	0
Bath & NE Somerset	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	4	4	1
Berkshire	4	4	2
Bexley	0	0	0
Birmingham	12	12	1
Bolton	2	2	1
Bournemouth	0	0	0
Bradford	8	8	3
Brent	6	6	2
Brighton & Hove	3	3	0
Bristol	7	7	0
Bromley	4	4	1
Buckinghamshire	2	2	0
Bury	1	1	1
Calderdale	4	4	0
Cambridgeshire	4	4	0
Camden	3	3	0
Cheshire	3	3	1
Cornwall	1	1	0
Corporation of London	0	0	0
Coventry	4	4	0
Croydon	7	7	2
Cumbria	8	8	2
Darlington	0	0	0
Derby City	0	0	0
Derbyshire	9	10	2
Devon	10	10	3
Doncaster	0	0	0
Dorset	5	5	1
Dudley	2	2	0
Durham	0	1	1
East Riding of Yorks	1	1	0
Ealing	1	1	0
East Sussex	4	4	1
Enfield	2	2	0
Essex	19	19	0
Gateshead	2	3	1
Gloucestershire	6	6	2
Greenwich	7	7	2
Hackney	9	9	3
Hammersmith & Fulham	3	3	2
Hampshire	7	7	1
Haringey	8	8	2
Harrow	0	0	0
Hartlepool	0	0	0
Havering	2	2	0
Hereford & Worcester	4	4	0
Hertfordshire	7	7	0
Hillingdon	3	3	0
Hounslow	2	2	0
Isle of Wight	2	2	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0
Islington	6	6	0
Kensington & Chelsea	0	0	0
Kent	17	17	0
Kingston Upon Hull	7	7	2
Kingston Upon Thames	1	1	0
Kirklees	4	4	1
Knowsley	2	2	0
Lambeth	14	14	6
Lancashire	22	22	2
Leeds	11	11	4
Leicester City	9	9	1
Leicestershire	3	3	1
Lewisham	6	6	1
Lincolnshire	7	7	3
Liverpool	15	15	4
Luton	2	2	0
Manchester	10	10	1
Merton	1	1	0
Middlesbrough	2	2	0
Milton Keynes	4	4	1
N Lincolnshire	1	1	0
NE Lincolnshire	0	0	0
Newcastle	3	3	1
Newham	8	9	2
Norfolk	16	16	7
North Somerset	2	2	0
North Tyneside	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	4	4	0
Northamptonshire	5	5	1
Northumberland	3	3	0
Nottingham	13	13	3
Oldham	4	4	2
Oxfordshire	9	9	1

LEA	Number of schools failing in 4 years to 31 March 1998	Number of schools failing in 5 years to 31 March 1998	Schools removed from special measures or closed
Poole	0	0	0
Portsmouth	1	1	0
Redbridge	1	1	1
Redcar & Cleveland	0	0	0
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	0
Rochdale	2	2	1
Rotherham	1	1	0
Rutland	1	1	0
Salford	5	5	0
Sandwell	10	10	1
Sefton	0	0	0
Sheffield	11	11	2
Shropshire	4	4	1
Solihull	3	3	1
Somerset	5	5	2
South Gloucestershire	0	0	0
South Tyneside	3	3	0
Southampton	2	2	0
Southwark	6	6	2
St. Helens	1	1	0
Staffordshire	7	7	2
Stockport	3	3	0
Stockton-on-Tees	2	2	0
Stoke-on-Trent	6	6	1
Suffolk	2	2	0
Sunderland	3	3	0
Surrey	9	9	2
Sutton	3	3	1
Swindon	0	0	0
Tameside	2	2	1
Tower Hamlets	5	5	1
Trafford	1	1	0
Wakefield	0	0	0
Walsall	4	4	0
Waltham Forest	7	7	3
Wandsworth	5	6	1
Warwickshire	3	3	0
West Sussex	0	0	0
Westminster	3	3	0
Wigan	3	3	2
Wiltshire	4	4	2
Wirral	1	1	0
Wolverhampton	6	7	2
York	0	0	0

The figures include grant-maintained schools and independent schools, but exclude schools which have been inspected but await the publication of the Ofsted report. Some schools are now in different local education authorities after local government reorganisation.

Undergraduates

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the numbers of full-time and sandwich undergraduates by socio-economic groups A to E in (i) 1985, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1995. [37548]

Dr. Howells: The data held centrally on full-time undergraduate students by social classes A to E is provided in the following table. It shows the numbers of accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses who apply through the admissions services for universities and colleges; however not all full-time undergraduate students enter through these services.

Accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in the UK, by social class (home domiciled, all ages)

for entry in autumn:	1985		1990		1991		1995
Admissions service[1]	UCCA	PCAS	UCCA	PCAS	UCCA	PCAS	UCAS
Social class[2]							
I Professional (A)	14,644	n/a	17,475	n/a	18,567	7,950	38,719
II Intermediate (B)	33,588	n/a	44,718	n/a	48,114	30,813	103,404
IIIn Skilled non-manual (C_1)	7,285	n/a	9,838	n/a	10,945	8,710	30,271
IIIm Skilled manual (C_2)	8,889	n/a	10,651	n/a	11,463	11,883	42,541
IV Partly skilled (D)	4,628	n/a	5,685	n/a	6,166	6,529	19,780
V Unskilled (E)	808	n/a	866	n/a	919	1,187	5,039
Unknown	6,339	n/a	10,144	n/a	10,543	27,393	25,782
Total	76,181	n/a	99,377	77,539	106,717	94,465	265,536

[1] Universities & Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) in operation since 1994. Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) existed 1961 to 1993. Polytechnics and Colleges Admissions Services (PCAS) existed 1986 to 1993.

[2] The classification system to assign social class to applicants is that used in the National Census--the Standard Occupational Classification published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. (A), (B), (C1), (C2), (D), (E) are the institute of practitioners in advertising (IPA) equivalent definition of social class.

Note:

n/a = indicates information not collected by the admissions service in that year.

Celebrating Europe Competition

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have submitted entrants for the Celebrating Europe competition; and how many prizes are available. [36957]

Dr. Howells: 312 schools in the United Kingdom submitted entries for the Celebrating Europe competition. 10 awards with a value of £5,000 each are available to the winners, six of which are for primary, secondary and special schools and four for colleges and youth organisations. There will also be some runners-up awards.

Schools (New Books)

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many schools have not taken up their entitlement under the scheme to provide £1,000 for new books which he announced on 29 January; [37701]

(2) what is his current estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of the scheme to provide £1,000 for each school for new books which he announced on 29 January. [37702]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* The total grant available for new books in 1997–98 was £23m, including £1m for grant-maintained schools, found from savings with existing Departmental budgets. LEA-maintained schools have received grant through the Standards Fund, paid via their LEA. So far 97 per cent. of the Standards Fund grant offered has been claimed by authorities. The final figure for take up will be known in the autumn. The Funding Agency for Schools has allocated the £1m for GM schools. Expenditure figures for individual schools are not held centrally.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the Equal Opportunities Commission review to be complete. [36847]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We understand the EOC are hoping to submit its recommendations to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, this summer.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Martin Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 18 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *741*, which three of the four proposals were part of the draft of the Green Paper on special educational needs when it was presented to the National Advisory Group on 2 September; which was generated by the Advisory Group itself; and if the three proposals in the pre-2 September draft were included at the insistence of the Audit Commission. [37384]

Ms Estelle Morris: All papers of the National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs (SEN), including the draft Green Paper considered by the Group on 2 September 1997, are confidential. I am however currently considering whether both the notes of meetings and papers of the Group might generally be published in future.

The Audit Commission has at no stage made representations in relation to the SEN Green Paper. The proposals on which we consulted were options for making progress towards the objectives set out in the Labour Party's consultation paper of March 1997, "Every Child is Special".

Higher Education

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 962, what was the source of the statistics on participation in higher education in various constituencies. [37549]

Dr. Howells: The data quoted by the Secretary of State on 16 March was derived from the 1991 Census and was published by the Office for National Statistics in the "New Parliamentary Constituency Monitor" series. These do not measure participation in higher education; these data show the proportion of people with higher education qualifications in each constituency. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Dyslexia

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if his Department (i) maintains and (ii) requires local education authorities to maintain a register of approved providers for the teaching of dyslexics. [37343]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department maintains a list of non-maintained special schools and independent schools approved as suitable for children with special education needs. The Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexia (CReSTeD) maintains a register of schools that help dyslexic children. The majority of children with dyslexia will be educated in their local maintained school with appropriate additional support.

Education Reform Booklet

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish a booklet for parents relating to education reforms introduced since 1 May 1997. [37465]

Mr. Byers: We have yet to take final decisions on the details of the Department's advertising and publicity strategy for the year ahead. But we certainly intend to reflect in it the importance of helping parents to take decisions about the education of their children and to work in partnership with schools.

New Deal (Stoke-on-Trent)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from (i) employers, (ii) trades unions, (iii) non-Governmental groups and (iv) individuals in Stoke-on-Trent, North in respect of the New Deal. [37195]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Employment Service have worked closely with a very wide range of partners to deliver New Deal in Stoke-on-Trent as elsewhere. Discussions have taken place with employers, trade unions, local authorities, voluntary organisations, other non-governmental groups and individuals.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of the number of people in the Stoke-on-Trent, North constituency who are eligible for the New Deal for (i) 18–24 year olds, (ii) lone parents, (iii) people with a disability or long-term illness and (iv) adults over 25 years who have been unemployed for two years or more; and if he will make a statement. [37192]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have placed in the Library a list of the client planning assumptions for each New Deal unit of delivery which the Employment Service is using to plan provision for young unemployed people aged 18 to 24. The table shows that the planning assumptions for

the Staffordshire unit of delivery, which includes the Stoke-on-Trent, North constituency, is that 3,530 young people could be eligible to join the New Deal in 1998–99. We have yet to finalise planning assumptions for participation in the other New Deal groups.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* interviews with unemployed young people have been completed, *(b)* jobs have been pledged and *(c)* employers have signed up to the new deal in Stoke-on-Trent North. [37194]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The New Deal in the Staffordshire unit of delivery, which includes Stoke-on-Trent, North constituency, does not start until 6 April. As a result no interviews have yet taken place. Employers have backed New Deal in Staffordshire as they have throughout the country, and pledges and Employer Agreements will follow as New Deal gets under way.

Environmental Task Force

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many non-Governmental groups have expressed an interest in participating in the Environment Task Force within Stoke-on-Trent, North to date. [37191]

Mr. Andrew Smith: North Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council have formed a consortium to deliver the Environment Task Force option in the North Staffordshire area. Nine voluntary organisations are involved in the consortium which may offer projects in the Stoke-on-Trent, North area and there are five other organisations whose involvement is under consideration.

Employment Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the training available to Employment Service staff to equip them to operate the New Deal from 6 April. [37193]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In all, the Employment Service (ES) expects to deliver over 50,000 training days to equip its staff to operate New Deal in addition to established training provision. The main recipients of training will be ES New Deal Personal Advisers but a variety of other training is taking place including coverage of marketing, vacancy taking, team leadership and processes.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *201*, on Welfare to Work, when he expects the results of the first year pilots to be completed; if they will be made publicly available; and if he will make a statement. [34445]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 13 March 1998]:* We expect that the first results of the pilots starting in October this year will be available by end of 1999. As part of the New Deal for Disabled People we will also be developing a programme of research and evaluation to increase our understanding of the client group and to determine the effect of our initiatives. The results of the research will be made available to all those with an interest in promoting employment opportunities for disabled people and people with long-term health problems. This is in keeping with the Government's continuing policy of openness.

National Disability Development Initiative

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many projects have been funded under the National Disability Development Initiative; how many have started; and what monitoring and evaluation is taking place. [36351]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick, dated 8 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of projects which have been funded under the National Disability Development Initiative; how many have started; and what monitoring and evaluation is taking place. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

I regret that I am unable to provide you with exactly the information you have requested as currently no contracts have been awarded under the National Disability Development Initiative. However, I can confirm that nine preferred tenders have been selected by the National Disability Development Initiative Board, and that contract negotiations are at an advanced stage. I can also confirm that the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities hopes to make an announcement about the successful projects towards the end of April.

I hope this is helpful.

New Deal

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people are eligible to sign up to the New Deal; how many people have signed up to the New Deal; how many businesses have signed up to support the New Deal; and what is the New Deal's total investment in the South West Hertfordshire constituency. [38342]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* I have placed in the Library a list of the client volume planning assumptions for each New Deal unit of delivery which the Employment Service is using to plan provision for young people aged 18 to 24. The table shows that the planning assumption for Hertfordshire unit of delivery, which includes the South-West Hertfordshire constituency, is that 1585 young people could be eligible to join the New Deal in 1998–99.

In Hertfordshire unit of delivery 460 clients have been invited to enter the Gateway.

To date, more than 4,500 employers have signed nationally of which 42 are in this delivery unit. This number will rise significantly as New Deal is fully operational in this area from 6 April.

It is not possible to state exactly the total investment in New Deal in the area as New Deal is a client led initiative and sufficient funds will be made available to meet the needs of all those eligible.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people are eligible to sign up to the New Deal; how many businesses have signed up to support the New Deal; and what is the New Deal's total investment in the Hexham constituency. [38166]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have placed in the Library a list of the client volume planning assumptions for each New Deal unit of delivery which the Employment Service is using to plan provision for young people aged 18 to 24. The table shows that the planning assumption for Northumberland unit of delivery, which includes the Hexham constituency, is that 1,588 young people could be eligible to join the New Deal in 1998–99.

To date, more than 4,500 employers have signed nationally of which 7 are in this delivery unit. This number will rise significantly as New Deal is operational in this area from 6 April.

It is not possible to state exactly the total investment in New Deal in the area as New Deal is a client-led initiative and sufficient funds will be made available to meet the needs of all those eligible.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people in the constituency of Wellingborough will be eligible for assistance through the New Deal in the current financial year. [36435]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have placed in the Library a list of the client volume planning assumptions for each New Deal unit of delivery which the Employment Service is using to plan provision for young unemployed people aged 18 to 24. The table shows that the planning assumption for the Northamptonshire unit of delivery, which includes the Wellingborough constituency, is that, 1968 young people could be eligible join the New Deal in 1998–99.

Disabled People

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are registered disabled in England and Wales. [36581]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 repealed the registration provisions of the 1944 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act. Access to the programmes offered by my Department for people with disabilities does not depend on any process of registration.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the indicators that will be used to measure the targets for *(a)* an increase in the number of disabled people able to work and *(b)* a reduction in discrimination against disabled people as proposed in the green paper. [37995]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Setting out proposed success measures and inviting debate on them is an unprecedented break with the past and a key step forward. The Government have phrased them in broad terms initially to generate a wide debate. We would welcome views on how they should be refined.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many staff are employed in Scotland by his Department, or executive agencies responsible to his Department; and where those staff are located; [36626]

(2) how many staff are employed in Scotland by executive agencies responsible to his Department; and where those staff are located. [36628]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 8 April 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions regarding the number of staff employed in Scotland by his Department, or Executive Agencies responsible to his Department; and where those staff are located. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

I can confirm that the only Department for Education and Employment staff employed in Scotland are staff from the Employment Service. These staff are spread across 130 Jobcentres, 15 District Offices and our Office for Scotland.

I attach a breakdown of the number of staff per District and the number of staff working within the Employment Service Office for Scotland.

I hope this is helpful.

Employment Service staff in post/Scotland as at March 1998

District	*Total*
Ayrshire North	157
Borders East & Midlothian	118
Edinburgh	250
Fife	186
Forth Valley—Lothian West	224
Glasgow Central and South	301
Glasgow North East & East Dunbarton	228
Glasgow West Oban & West Dunbarton	263
Grampian Orkney & Shetland	190
Highlands North West & Stornoway	70
Lanarkshire	301
Renfrewshire Inverclyde & South Argyll	194
Ross-Shire Inverness & Moray	145
South West Scotland	184
Tayside	249
Office for Scotland	340
Grand total	3,400

School Standards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is his Department's calculation of the proportion of all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils first inspected in each school year from 1993–94 to 1996–97 that had statistically significant greater point increases in their pupils' average total GCSE point scores compared with their average in the school year immediately preceding that of their inspection than the national average point increase for all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils for the same corresponding periods by *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997, as applicable, and for each annual group of

schools and each period, what was the average total point score of all their pupils for each school year from that immediately preceding that of inspection to 1997; what were the average point increases in all their pupils' scores for each of the four periods as applicable; how many schools there were in each group and what were their total number of 15-year-old pupils in each of the five years involved; and what was the national average GCSE point increase for all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils in each of the (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1993 to 1995, (iii) 1993 to 1996 and (iv) 1993 to 1997, with all point scores stated to one decimal place; [27301]

(2) what is his Department's calculation of the proportion of all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils first inspected in each school year from 1993–94 to 1996–97 that had point increases in their pupils' average total GCSE point scores compared with their average in the school year immediately preceding that of their inspection that were not statistically significantly different from the national average point increase for all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils for the same corresponding periods by *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997, as applicable, and for each annual group of schools and each period, what was the average total point score of all their pupils for each school year from that immediately preceding that of inspection to 1997; what were the average point changes in all their pupils' scores in each of the four periods as applicable, with all point scores stated to one decimal place; and how many schools there were in each group and what were their total number of 15-year-old pupils in each of the years involved; [27302]

(3) what is his Department's calculation of the proportion of all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils first inspected in each school year from 1993–94 to 1996–97 that had statistically significant lesser point increases in their pupils' average total GCSE point scores compared with their average in the school year immediately preceding that of their inspection than the national average point increase for all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils for the same corresponding periods by *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997, as applicable; and for each annual group of schools and each period, what was the average total point score of all their pupils for each school year from that immediately preceding that of inspection to 1997; what were the average point changes in all their pupils' scores in each of the four year periods as applicable, with all point scores stated to one decimal place; and how many schools there were in each group and what were their total number of 15-year-old pupils in each of the years involved; [27303]

(4) what were the national Key Stage 2 SAT test average point scores, stated to one decimal place, of all maintained Year 6 pupils in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997 in each of English, maths and science, and also of their totals for all three subjects together, when each pupils' subject score is calculated by awarding the same number of points as the National Curriculum level they attained; and what was the total number of pupils in each case; [27304]

(5) for all those maintained primary schools with Year 6 pupils that had not been inspected by Ofsted for the first time since 1 September 1992 in each school year *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97, what is his Department's calculation of the averages of the joint total English, maths, and science national Key Stage 2 SAT test point scores, stated to one decimal place, of all the pupils in each of these annual groups of schools for each school year from 1994–95 to 1996–97, as applicable, when each pupil's subject score is calculated by awarding the same number of points as the National Curriculum level attained; and what were the total numbers of schools in each group and of all their Year 6 pupils in each year since 1993–94 inclusive; [27305]

(6) for all those maintained primary schools with Year 6 pupils inspected by Ofsted for the first time since 1 September 1992 in each school year *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97, what is his Department's calculation of the averages of the joint total English, maths, and science national Key Stage 2 SAT test point scores, stated to one decimal place, of all the pupils in each of these annual groups of schools for each school year from 1994–95 to 1996–97, as applicable, when each pupil's subject score is calculated by awarding the same number of points as the National Curriculum level attained; and what were the total numbers of schools in each group and of all their Year 6 pupils in each year since 1993–94 inclusive; [27306]

(7) what is his Department's calculation of the proportion of all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils first inspected in each school year from 1993–94 to 1996–97 that had statistically significant absolute declines in their pupils' average total GCSE point scores compared with their average in the school year immediately preceding that of inspection by *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997, as applicable; for each annual group of schools and each period, what was the average total point score of all their pupils for each school year from that immediately preceding that of inspection to 1997; what were the average point declines in all their pupils' scores in each of the four year periods as applicable, with all point scores stated to one decimal place; how many schools there were in each group; and what were their total number of 15-year-old pupils in each of the five years involved; [27307]

(8) what is his Department's calculation of the proportion of all maintained primary schools with Year 6 pupils first inspected in each school year 1995–96 and 1996–97 that had point changes in the average of the totals of their pupils' point scores in their English, maths and science Key Stage 2 SAT tests together compared with their average for the school year immediately preceding that of their inspection that were not statistically significantly different from the national average point increase for all maintained Year 6 pupils *(a)* by 1996 and *(b)* by 1997 for the same corresponding periods as applicable, when each pupils' subject score is calculated by awarding the same number of points as the National Curriculum level they attained; for each annual group of schools and each period, what was the average total point score of all their pupils together for these three subjects for each school year from that immediately preceding that of inspection to 1997; what were the average point changes in all their pupils' scores in each period as applicable; how many schools there were in each group; and what were their total numbers of Year 6 pupils in each of the three years involved; [27308]

(9) what is his Department's calculation of the proportion of all maintained primary schools with Year 6 pupils first inspected in each school year 1995–96 and 1996–97 that had point increases in the average of the

totals of their pupils' point scores in their English, maths and science Key Stage 2 SAT tests together compared with their average for the school year immediately preceding that of their inspection that were statistically significantly less than the national average point increase for all maintained Year 6 pupils *(a)* by 1996 and *(b)* by 1997 for the same corresponding periods as applicable, when each pupils' subject score is calculated by awarding the same number of points as the National Curriculum level they attained; for each annual group of schools and each period, what was the average total point score of all their pupils together for these three subjects for each school year from that immediately preceding that of inspection to 1997; what were the average point changes in all their pupils' scores in each period as applicable; how many schools there were in each group; and what were their total numbers of Year 6 pupils in each of the three years involved; [27309]

(10) what was the absolute point increase in the average total GCSE point score per pupil per maintained school with 15-year-olds between 1993 and 1997; and what assessment his Department has made of the relationship between these figures and the amount of time between 30 June 1997 and the date of first being inspected by Ofsted after 1 September 1993 for each such school; [22850]

(11) for all those maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils first inspected in school years *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97, what were the average total GCSE point scores per pupil of each of these groups of schools in each year from 1992 to 1997; and what were the numbers of schools and 15-year-old pupils in each group; [22855]

(12) for all those maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils that had not been inspected for the first time since 1 September 1993 by the end of the school years *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97, what were the average total GCSE point scores per pupil of each of these groups of schools in each year from 1992 to 1997; and what were the numbers of schools and 15-year-old pupils in each group; [22856]

(13) what were *(a)* the annual point increase in the average total GCSE point score per pupil per maintained school with 15-year-olds in each July to July school year in (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96 and (iv) 1996–97 and *(b)* the amount of time measured in school days between the date of being inspected by Ofsted and 30 June in each of these years for each such school that was first inspected after 1 September 1993 in that year; and what assessment his Department has made of the degree of correlation between the two; [22857]

(14) what percentage of 15-year-old pupils, excluding those in special schools, gained *(a)* at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, *(b)* at least five GCSEs and *(c)* at least one GCSE in 1997. [22858]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 14 January 1998 and 3 February 1998]:* The information is shown in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

School Exclusions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the recent Audit Commission report on children who are excluded from school. [38185]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Audit Commission report, "Misspent Youth", noted that a significant proportion of juvenile offenders had been excluded from school. We believe that the figures for permanent exclusions from schools are too high and are reviewing our approach to this issue in the light of the Education and Employment Select Committee's report, "Disaffected Children (Fifth Report, 1997–98)" and the forthcoming report of the Social Exclusion Unit.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received on the level of school exclusions in the West Midlands. [38184]

Ms Estelle Morris: None.

Early Years Development Plans

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to announce funding for Early Years Development Plans. [38777]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Allocations are being announced this week. 120 LEAs and their partners will receive funding totalling £6 million for a wide range of projects to create additional childcare places for pre-school children and 4-year-olds in full-time education.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Selective Assistance

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 4 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *638*, if she will make a statement on the cost per job limits on regional selective assistance imposed by the Government indicating any *(a)* regional variations and *(b)* variations according to development area status. [38227]

Mrs. Roche: Cost per job is a useful means of assessing value for money against the objective of the RSA scheme to create or safeguard jobs. Each case is judged on its merits and there is no fixed rate of grant per job. The cost per job ceiling is higher in Development Areas than Intermediate Areas.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *235*, if she will list the average levels of regional selective assistance by region for *(a)* full and *(b)* intermediate development areas as a percentage of the project's capital cost. [38210]

Mrs. Roche: This information is provided in the Industrial Development Act 1982 Annual Report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many exceptions were made in 1997 to cost per job limits on regional selective assistance; and if she will list these exceptions. [38228]

Mrs. Roche: One exception was made for a project by the Rover Group to build a new engine plant in the West Midlands.

Airlines (Predatory Pricing)

Mr. Love: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she is taking to investigate the use of predatory pricing in the airlines industry; and if she will make a statement. [38376]

Mrs. Beckett: Under UK competition legislation, the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for investigating allegations of anti-competitive and monopolistic behaviour.

In addition, if the behaviour fell under EC competition law, the Competition Directorate of the European Commission has the powers to gather the information necessary to assess a given case, and to terminate any infringements.

Complaints about alleged anti-competitive practices should therefore be forwarded to the Director General or the European Commission as the case may be.

Spammers

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on action against junk E-mailers, known as spammers. [37579]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The EU Telecommunications Data Protection Directive, which must be implemented by October this year, provides protection from unsolicited calls for direct marketing purposes. The Government will be consulting on the implementation of the Directive, which may include e-mail, later this year.

The Data Protection Registrar has been working on a proposal to prevent people receiving unsolicited e-mails through the insertion of suppression markers in their Internet addresses and the Direct Marketing Association are working on ideas for an e-mail preference scheme.

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for licences for the export of *(a)* paramilitary, *(b)* security and *(c)* police equipment to Indonesia have been (i) granted, (ii) refused and (iii) revoked since 13 November 1997; and of those separate totals, if she will state the individual export licence category for each of them. [35719]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the results are as follows. Between 14 November 1997 and 6 March 1998 inclusive, 29 Standard Individual Export Licences were issued to export to end-users or consignees in Indonesia goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order (the so-called "Military List"), and none was revoked; two applications for such Licences were refused. This information is summarised below, broken down according to the entries in the Military List under which the goods on each licence are controlled (known as their rating). It could not be broken down in the manner requested as the equipment covered by most entries in the Military List could be used by military, paramilitary or police end-users. Standard Individual export licences can cover a range of goods, controlled under several entries in the legislation. Where this is so the licence is included in the Table in the total shown against each of the relevant ratings.

No Open Individual Licences for such exports were issued or revoked in this period, and no applications for such licences were refused. This does not include Media OIELs, which are Open Individual Export Licences authorising the export to any destination of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists when working in areas of conflict.

Standard individual export licences

Rating	*Licences issued*	*Applications refused*
ML1	3	1
ML2	2	0
ML4	1	0
ML10	11	0
ML11	8	0
ML13	4	0
ML14	3	0
ML15	2	0
PL5017	0	1

The information should be considered in light of my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, Columns *870–71*.

In addition to the above, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Indonesia during the period concerned under various Open General Export Licences. Copies of all such licences are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what armaments have been licensed for export to Indonesia since 13 November 1997. [38127]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) today.

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what impact the criteria set out in the written answer of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, have had on the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of export licences circulated to other departments by the Export Control Organisation. [36758]

Mrs. Roche: The criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs are intended to ensure that arms transfers are managed responsibly and that they do not contribute to internal repression or international aggression. Therefore, the announcement did not result in any change to the arrangements by which DTI circulates applications. Irrespective of whether or not they have to be circulated, the number of applications received by the Department at any time is affected by many factors, and any change could not be ascribed to any one factor alone.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list *(a)* all United Kingdom arms exports and *(b)* all arms export deals for which licences have been (i) refused and (ii) cancelled since 1 May 1997. [28717]

Mrs. Roche: The Department of Trade and Industry does not compile records of exports to any destination.

The Export Control Organisation's databases have been interrogated and the results are as follows.

Decision reached between 2 May 1997 and 12 January 1998

	Refused in full	*Revoked*
Standard individual export licences	23	8
Open individual export licences	3	0

The entry in the legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. Individual export licences often cover a range of goods, controlled under several entries in the legislation. Where this is so the application or licence is included in the Table in the total shown against each of the relevant ratings.

Applications for individual export licences refused in full between 2 May 1997 and 12 January 1998 covering goods on the Military List

Number of applications refused in full covering goods with this rating	*Standard individual export licences*	*Open individual export licences*
ML1	8	0
ML2	2	0
ML3	3	1
ML4	0	2
ML6	3	0
ML7	1	0
ML9	2	0
ML11	2	0
ML13	1	0
ML14	1	0
PL5001	1	0
PL5002	1	0
PL5017	1	0
PL5031	1	0

Individual export licences revoked in full between 2 May 1997 and 12 January 1998 covering goods on the Military List

Number of licences revoked in full covering goods with this rating	*Standard individual export licences*	*Open individual export licences*
ML1	4	0
ML2	2	0
ML3	1	0
PL5001	1	0
PL5018	1	0
PL5021	1	0

This information should be considered in light of my answer to my hon Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

Internet

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the European Commission's stance on the United States proposal to exempt international trade on the Internet from customs duties; and if the Government will be pursuing this issue through the World Trade Organisation. [37584]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The EU and the US agreed a joint statement on electronic commerce at their summit last December. This included an agreement to work as soon as possible toward a global understanding that there would continue to be no customs duties on electronic transmissions. This remains the Government's policy. The treatment of electronic commerce in the World Trade Organisation is currently being pursued by the Government in discussion with the European Commission and other EU Member States.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations she has received from trade officers in British embassies in *(a)* Japan, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* South Korea and *(d)* the USA, on the impact of the current level of the sterling exchange rate and its effects on (i) British exports to that country and (ii) inward investments from that country to Britain. [36343]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The Government are aware, through information from our posts abroad and other sources, of the difficulties being faced by exporters, particularly in Europe and East Asia, as a result of the current level of sterling. The Government's aim is for a stable and competitive pound over the medium term, and to achieve this they are committed to delivering a stable macroeconomic framework in which businesses can plan and invest for the long term.

Partnerships

Mr. Pearson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list each *(a)* scheme, *(b)* initiative and *(c)* programme funded by (i) her Department, (ii) the Office of Science and Technology and (iii) the research councils, which have as an objective the building of partnerships between industry and academia. [38284]

Mrs. Beckett: Below are listed activities involving the collaboration between industry and academia which are funded by the DTI (including OST) and the Research Councils. They aim to encourage sustained partnerships between academia and industry through mechanisms such as joint technology development projects and technology transfer activities which include academics working in industry.

Cross Government schemes co-ordinated by OST

- LINK initiative (Government funding from DTI, OST, EPSRC and 10 other Research Councils and Government Departments)
- Foresight LINK Awards (Government funding from DTI and OST through Research Councils)
- Foresight Programme (trans-departmental initiative managed by OST)

Joint DTI and Research Council Initiatives

- Teaching Company Scheme (also includes other Government Departments)
- Innovative Manufacturing Initiative
- Postgraduate Training Partnerships (with EPSRC only)

Schemes funded by the DTI

- College Business Partnerships
- Shell Technology Enterprise Programme (DTI provides funding for the programme)

Schemes funded by OST

President's Partnership Prize

Schemes funded by Research Councils

Realising Our Potential Awards (ROPAs)

Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering (CASE), Industrial CASE, CASE Plus

Industry Fellowships (with the Royal Society and Rolls Royce)

PPARC Industrial Programme Support Scheme (PIPSS)

Integrated Graduate Development Scheme

Engineering Doctorate (EPSRC only)

Faraday Partnerships (EPSRC only)

CONNECT (NERC only)

Joint Research Equipment Initiative (JREI) (with Higher Education Funding Councils and industry)

MRC Collaborative Centres

WILLOWS (BBSRC only)

ACTIN (BBSRC only)

New Entrepreneurs Prize (BBSRC only)

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Randall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has held with EU partners in relation to the problems associated with millennium computer compliance. [25357]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 4 February 1998]:* The Millennium Bug was discussed at the Telecommunications Council on 26 February and the Internal Market Council on 30 March and will continue to be discussed in the Council of Ministers at all suitable opportunities. My Department is also organising a high level Presidency conference in London on 8 May for Millennium Bug experts from all Member States. the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry has raised the issue in meetings with her French, German and Swedish counterparts and will continue to do so in meetings with her EU colleagues as the opportunity arises.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received in the last fortnight about the Millennium Bug Hotline. [32682]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 3 March 1998]:* None.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will pass questions tabled to her Department regarding Action 2000 to Action 2000; and if she will request them to reply to hon. Members. [29747]

Mrs. Roche: My practice is to consult Action 2000 on Questions which relate to their activities before replying.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will introduce measures to regulate the charging activities of consultancies that market services for dealing with millennium compliance. [38530]

Mrs. Roche: I have no plans to do this. Action 2000 and the Business Links are tasked with signposting businesses to the best available help.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she estimates the regulators for gas, water, telecommunications and electricity will confirm that their utilities will be millennium compliant; and if she will make a statement. [37489]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 2 April 1998]:* Ofgas is already monitoring the preparations which members of the gas industry are making to ensure millennium compliance. Reports received to date indicate that most companies will have achieved millennium compliance for critical systems by January 1999. Ofgas will be following-up shortly with the remaining gas companies who have not yet responded.

Ofwat can confirm that it expects water and water and sewerage companies to be millennium compliant. It has required all companies to supply details of their plans to achieve compliance before 1 January 2000. It intends to hold a seminar with the companies shortly to discuss the issues, including contingency plans. In addition, it will be visiting a number of companies.

Oftel is satisfied that most network operators are making adequate preparations and Oftel is continuing to take an active role in monitoring these preparations. Most operators plan to confirm that their equipment is millennium compliant in the first half of 1998. Oftel plan to write to all operators again in June to get an update on progress.

Offer recently wrote to all licensees and other bodies in the electricity supply industry to seek information about their approach to the millennium issue. They wish to ensure that IT problems will not significantly affect electricity supplies. A reply by 30 April was requested.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on progress to date made by the Action 2000 group and their programme for the next six months. [32285]

Mrs. Roche: On 22 January 1998, Don Cruickshank, Chairman of Action 2000, launched the Millennium Bug campaign. the initial activities included: promoting the importance of the issue and sign posting help, identifying practical help and guidance, investigating measures to redress the current shortage of IT skilled people, making available information on tools and services, assessing the current extent of the problem and monitoring progress.

On 26 February the Chairman announced a second programme of action, which includes specific advice on embedded systems, advising on product compliance and software testing, and producing a set of Millennium case studies.

Action 2000's outline plan for the coming months includes:

updating and improving the Hotline service, website and Information material,

working with the Departments for Education and Employment and Trade and Industry on the Training for 20,000 "Bug Fixers" as announced by the Prime Minister on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *374–76*,

providing a toolkit to help Business Links work with businesses,

implementing a programme of training for the Personal Business Advisers and Special Advisers in Business Links and their equivalents in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland,

developing a database of information on software support contractors and available diagnostic packages,

developing a questionnaire and benchmarking process acceptable across all business sectors,

implementing a communications programme to ensure all business are made aware of the significance of the problem and sign-posting sources of help, and,

participating in a project to identify the particular risks across the public sector.

Exports

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the export per capita of each of the standard regions in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* the latest available year. [38120]

Mrs. Roche: Data on exports by regions are not available.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the value of exports to India in each of the last 20 years. [38121]

Mrs. Roche: Information on UK exports to India in each of the last 20 years is given in the following table:

UK Exports to India 1978–97

£ million

	Goods	*Services*	*Goods and Services*
1978	348	n/a	n/a
1979	456	n/a	n/a
1980	531	n/a	n/a
1981	637	n/a	n/a
1982	806	n/a	n/a
1983	803	n/a	n/a
1984	780	n/a	n/a
1985	896	n/a	n/a
1986	941	n/a	n/a
1987	1,088	n/a	n/a
1988	1,114	250	1,364
1989	1,383	282	1,665
1990	1,264	296	1,560
1991	1,017	258	1,275
1992	946	305	1,251
1993	1,131	347	1,478
1994	1,313	397	1,710
1995	1,684	391	2,075
1996	1,706	390	2,096
1997	1,576	n/a	n/a

Notes:
Information on UK exports of services are only available from 1988. Data for 1997 will be available in August 1998. Figures for exports of goods are on an Overseas Trade Statistics (OTS) basis. Figures on exports of services are on a Balance of Payments (BOP) basis.
Source:
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics (MRETS), ONS UK Balance of Payments (The Pink Book), ONS.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the present value of United Kingdom exports to *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* Indonesia. [38119]

Mrs. Roche: In 1997, UK exports of goods to India were worth £1,576 million, Pakistan £269 million, and Indonesia £701 million.

Information for exports of services in 1998 is not yet available.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what regulations cover clean-up and decontamination operations involving the removal by high-pressure water hoses of radioactively-contaminated bird droppings from buildings not located on licensed nuclear facilities. [37836]

Mr. Battle: Protection of workers and the public from any work involving ionising radiation is covered by the provisions of the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1985 and is regulated by the Health and Safety Executive. The disposal of any radioactive materials, whether from licensed nuclear sites or elsewhere, is subject to the provisions of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. In addition, the disposal of any radioactivity, liquids or material resulting from such work is regulated by the Environment Agency.

A number of bodies, including the Environmental Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Health and Safety Executive, the Department of Health and the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), are closely involved in the work to remove the contaminated bird droppings from the house in Seascale and to ensure that it is undertaken in compliance with all the relevant health, safety and environmental regulations, including the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974.

Departmental Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of her Department's energy usage was from (i) renewable energy and (ii) combined heating in each year since 1989–90. [36166]

Mrs. Beckett: The Department purchases electricity from commercial suppliers. These suppliers obtain their electricity from a number of sources including renewables and combined heat and power.

Institute of Food Research

Mr. Tyler: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when she expects to publish the Atkinson report on the future of the Institute of Food Research; what were the terms of reference; and if she will make a statement on the Government's response to its recommendations; [38350]

(2) what impact the establishment of the Food Standards Agency will have on the role of the Institute of Food Research; [38346]

Mr. Battle: The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) set up a working group, chaired by Professor Bernard Atkinson, with the following terms of reference:

to assess the extent to which the programme of work at the Institute of Food Research (IFR) contributes to the need for underpinning food research identified by BBSRC, the food industry and others;

to examine the effectiveness of the present two-site operation, and the strengths and weaknesses of alternative arrangements, including the strengthening of organisational links between the IFR laboratories and their respective universities;

to make recommendations as appropriate for the organisational structure of the IFR and to identify any additional management and scientific skills required to ensure its future effectiveness.

It is for the BBSRC Council to take decisions on the future of the IFR, and subsequent action as necessary. The Council considered the working group's report on 10 February, and issued a press release the following day giving details of its conclusions to date.

I understand that the report was in the nature of advice to the Council and Chief Executive, and contained commentary that would be commercially damaging if published, as well as references to individuals. The BBSRC is therefore not inclined to publish the report. However, once final decisions are taken in the light of the further analysis of options for the future development of the IFR, currently being undertaken by the Chief Executive, BBSRC intends to publish the rationale for those decisions.

The White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change" made it clear that basic and strategic research into food would continue to be funded by the Research Councils and carried out by Research Council institutes, other institutes and universities as at present. The Institute of Food Research (IFR) will continue to be sponsored and funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

The Food Standards Agency will be responsible for determining its own research needs and commissioning research where it thinks best. I understand that the BBSRC working group, chaired by Professor Atkinson, recommended that a new strategic plan should be established in close partnership with the major users and beneficiaries of the IFR's research, and in particular that discussions should begin as soon as possible with the Agency to ensure that the IFR's research effectively underpins the Agency's work. The BBSRC Council agreed that the future development of the IFR and its scientific programme should be considered in the light of this and other recommendations from the working group, and the further analysis is proceeding accordingly.

Bilderberg Group

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the operations and influence on world trade of the Bilderberg Group. [37923]

Mrs. Roche: The Department has made no such assessments.

Newsprint

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the implications for the newsprint industry of the regulations increasing the contents of recycled paper in newsprint. [38525]

Mrs. Beckett: The Private Member's Bill on the recycled content of newsprint, which is now before the House, has a number of implications for the newsprint industry. These, and others relating to trade, competitiveness and the environment are all currently being assessed by the Government. Newsprint manufactured in the UK last year contained an average of 92% recycled paper.

Paper Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the effects of the strength of sterling on the competitiveness of the paper industry. [38527]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government clearly understand the worries of exporters and manufacturers in the paper industry and elsewhere at the rise in the pound. However, we are determined not to pursue policies leading to cycles of boom-bust. That is why the Government have taken the necessary decisions to secure a long-term economic framework, based on low inflation and sustainable public finances which will deliver a stable and competitive pound.

Energy Research

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount (i) in actual terms and (ii) in terms of the percentage of public expenditure on energy research and development will be spent in 1997–98 on research and development for *(a)* nuclear fission, *(b)* nuclear fusion, *(c)* fossil fuel generation and *(d)* renewable energy sources. [36882]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* My Department's estimated energy programme expenditure in 1997–98 was £222.2 million. The detailed expenditure figures requested, which reflect commitments inherited from the previous Administration, are as follows (percentage in brackets):

nuclear fission: nil

nuclear fusion: £17.1 million (7.7%)

fossil fuel generation: £3.7 million (1.7%)

renewables: £11.1 million (5.0%).

Food Science Contracts

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the food science research contracts allocated by the BBSRC in 1997–98 broken down by *(a)* length of contract, *(b)* value of contract and *(c)* institution securing the contract. [37950]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The BBSRC awards a competitive strategic grant (CSG) to the Institute of Food Research (IFR) annually. The figure for 1997–98 was £8,617k, including additions for superannuation, and reductions for MAFF transitional arrangements.

Unfortunately, in answer to my hon. Friend's previous question on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, Columns *565–566*, the figures for the BBSRC competitive strategic grant to the Institute of Food Research for 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 were wrongly stated. The correct information is:

1994–95: £7,497k

1995–96: £7,697k

1996–97: £8,187k.

The CSG is used by the Institute to fund research projects within BBSRC's remit. A list of projects started between April and August 1997 have been placed in the Library of the House; the length of each project is also provided. Typically one third of the projects funded from the CSG change each year; at 1 April 1997 therefore the CSG was already being used to fund a large body of research, details of which are not included in this answer.

In 1997–98, IFR also won a number of BBSRC ROPA awards. The total amount awarded, the projects and their duration have been placed in the Library of the House.

In addition BBSRC awards grants for food research to universities and other higher education institutions through the usual Research Council responsive mode procedures. A list of new awards in 1997–98 have been placed in the Library of the House; the lists show the total amount awarded by institution, and the titles and duration of the individual projects.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the food science research contracts allocated by *(a)* the Economic and Social Research Council, *(b)* the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, *(c)* the Medical Research Council and *(d)* the Natural Environment Research Council in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98, broken down by (1) length of contract, (2) value of contract and (3) institution securing the contract. [37948]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* A list of the grants awarded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the area of food science has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) awarded 43 grants starting in the period 1/4/94 to 31/3/98 relevant to the food and drink industries and a list of these has also been placed in the Library of the House.

The Medical Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council do not fund research into food science.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the private sector partnerships currently being undertaken in her Department and its agencies. [38305]

Mrs. Beckett: The following PFI/public private partnerships are currently in procurement within DTI and its agencies:

(i) The Radiocommunications Agency IT Strategic Partnership;

(ii) Electronic Government through Administrative Re-engineering;

(iii) The Teddington site re-development (National Physical Laboratory).

EU Structural Funds

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will make a statement on the Government's response to the latest proposed eligibility criteria for European Structural Funds with particular reference to Objective 1 funding; [36338]

(2) what recent representations she has made to the European Commission regarding the proposed eligibility criteria for areas awarded Objective 1 status, with particular reference to proposals on population density. [36339]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* We have now seen the draft regulations for Structural and cohesion Funds—which are part of the wider Agenda 2000 reform package. The regulations must now be agreed by all fifteen Member States and approved by the European Parliament.

I and Ministerial colleagues have pressed the Commission, and will continue to push, in respect of Objective 1, for flexibility around the 75 per cent. GDP threshold to allow for margins of error and for equal treatment of areas of sparse population like the Highlands and Islands, together with consideration for the special circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Job Creation

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the basis of her Department's calculations of the costs per job created in cases where Government support is sought. [37867]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* For RSA grants, the basis of the Department's cost per job (CPJ) calculation is the value of the grant divided by the number of full time equivalent (FTE) jobs directly created or safeguarded by the project. The definition of a full time equivalent job is 30 hours per week or more. Two part-time jobs of 15 or more hours per week count as equivalent to 1 full time job.

Supermarket Closures

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will limit the powers of a commercial company to close a supermarket on financial grounds if its closure would adversely affect the amenities of the local community. [36420]

Mrs. Beckett: Commercial decisions are matters for the company. Assessing the needs of local communities is the responsibility of local council.

Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to make it compulsory for employers to provide life insurance cover for workers in the offshore oil and gas industry. [32036]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 2 March 1998]:* This is also a matter for the Department of Transport, Environment and the Regions. The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 requires employers, with some exceptions, to insure their liability to employees for bodily injury or disease (including death arising from such injury or disease) sustained during their employment. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that funds are available to pay any compensation awarded where an employee (or dependant) has been successful in a civil action brought to establish an employer's liability for the injury or disease suffered by the employee. It is not the Government's policy to require employers to provide insurance cover for injury or disease where no such liability is established.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantity of individual or total pthalates was discharged by the offshore oil and gas industry in each of the last five years; and what assessment he has made of the reliability of the figures. [32388]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 5 March 1998]:* No products containing pthalates are known to have been discharged offshore in the last 5 years. No products containing pthalates are currently listed in the Offshore Chemical Notification Scheme.

Coal Miners Pension Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans the Government have to transfer money from the staff pension scheme of British Coal workers; what consultations she has undertaken concerning those proposals; and if she will make a statement. [28993]

Mr. Battle: Following wide consultation in 1993/94 in the run-up to coal privatisation, arrangements were put in place to safeguard the interests of members of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme (BCSSS). In exchange for providing a comprehensive guarantee that pension and deferred pension entitlements will rise at least in line with the retail prices index (RPI), the BCSSS Trustees agreed that the Government should receive 50% of any surpluses identified at periodic Scheme valuations.

The payments which the Government receive from surpluses in the BCSSS and its sister scheme, the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme, should be viewed against the backdrop of the deficiency contributions which the taxpayer has made to the Schemes. In the last 20 years alone these have totalled some £3 billion. In providing guarantees to the two Schemes, the Secretary of State is underwriting a liability the value of which is some £13.5 billion.

Post Office

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with *(a)* management and *(b)* trades unions over her plans to give greater commercial freedom to the Post Office. [38142]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Following my announcement last May of a review of options for granting the Post Office greater commercial freedom, I have consulted a wide range of interested parties, including the management and unions of the Post Office. I last met both management and union representatives on 6 April.

I and my officials will continue to have discussions with both management and unions during the next phase of the review, the terms of which were announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact of Post Office Counters' policy of increasing agency arrangements with multiple retailers at the expense of sole traders; and if she will make a statement. [38533]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Decisions relating to individual post office agency appointments are the operational responsibility of Post Office management. I understand from Post Office Counters Ltd. that they do not operate any policy of preferring multiple retailers to sole traders in making agency appointments and that each case is judged on its merits in the light of established criteria and interviews.

Car Prices

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she will take to put pressure on the European Commission to reduce discrepancies between prices for cars in the United Kingdom and other EU countries. [38064]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* I am determined to ensure that UK consumers are able to buy cars at the lowest possible prices. The European Commission, in January, announced its decision to fine Volkswagen ECU 102 million (about £67 million) for prohibiting its Italian dealers from selling cars to buyers from Germany and Austria, who wished to take advantage of the lower prices in Italy. DTI officials are currently discussing with the Commission what the implications of this case are for UK consumers wishing to buy right-hand drive cars at the lowest possible cost.

At the Government's initiative, the Commission are also undertaking studies of price differentials in EU markets, and the Government are keen for this work to be pushed forward.

Corporate Governance

Mr. Love: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to introduce minimum standards of corporate governance; and if she will make a statement. [38375]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made it clear when announcing the Government's plans for a major review of company law on 4 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *636–37*, that, while she did not rule out legislating to improve standards of corporate governance, she was in the first instance looking to companies and institutional investors to deliver improvements based on the best practice recommendations made by Cadbury, Greenbury, Hampel and others. The text of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's speech, which was made at a conference organised by Pensions Investment Research Consultants Limited (PIRC), is available on my Department's web site at http://www.dti.gov.uk/Minspeech/pircfin.htm.

Advertising Standards Authority

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will introduce legislation to replace the Advertising Standards Authority with a statutory body. [38301]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: No.

Toys (Safety)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the current regulatory safeguards on the use of PVC in toys for small children. [38300]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: There is no evidence that products have been marketed in the United Kingdom which breach the internationally accepted levels for phthalates. Under the Toys (Safety) Regulations 1995 and the General Product Safety Regulations 1994 suppliers are under a statutory obligation to supply safe toys and other products intended for children and action can be taken against a supplier of such articles found to release unacceptable levels of phthalates.

I am most concerned to ensure that our children are not exposed to dangerous childcare articles and toys. The UK is therefore taking a lead in Europe in seeking to produce a more satisfactory test method for the release of phthalates.

Coalminers (Lung Disease)

Yvette Cooper: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the former coalminers suffering from lung disease are likely to receive compensation following the recent High Court decision against the British Coal Corporation. [38924]

Mr. Battle: On 6 March the Department complied with a Court Order giving it four weeks to send detailed proposals to solicitors acting on behalf of the plaintiffs to settle the over 20,000 current claims and thousands more which are expected. We believe these proposals are fair and sensible and provide the quickest way of ensuring valid claims are settled. At a further hearing on 27 March the solicitors acting for the plaintiffs requested a three month adjournment which the Court granted, to allow for further discussions to take place with the Department's agents to seek to agree settlement arrangements.

We welcome this opportunity to further refine our proposals and hope that agreement can be reached quickly so payments can begin. However, we are also conscious that a further 3 month delay may be unwelcome to some claimants, particularly those who are severely disabled. We have therefore offered to make interim payments of £2,000 to a minimum of 5,000 elderly claimants currently in receipt of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema. We will begin making such offers as soon as the claimants' solicitors, whose co-operation we require, are able to submit evidence of receipt of the benefit. I am sure they will do all they can to assist this process to ensure that payments can be make quickly to their injured clients.

Some of the claims are expected to be from those miners who suffered from chronic bronchitis, alone. We are seeking to agree sensible payment arrangements also for those in this group. However none of the lead cases included in the judgment provided clear guidance on an appropriate level of damages for this condition.

Therefore, if it is not possible to reach agreement, it may be necessary, while accepting the liability established by the Court, for a further case to be run to establish a level of damages against which other similar claims can be assessed. We believe that such a case could, if need be, be brought to trial quickly and we would do everything possible to ensure that this happened.

I have said already that we have a duty to deal promptly with valid claims that stem from British Coal's previous activities and actions over many years. We are actively meeting that duty. We hope the plaintiffs' solicitors work with us to agree sensible arrangements to allow relevant claims to be processed systematically, and valid claims to be settled as soon as is practicable.

Fireworks

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from retailers of fireworks following the recently introduced prohibitions; and if she will make a statement. [38411]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The DTI has received some 60 identically styled letters from retailers with information about stocks of fireworks which may no longer be sold to the general public following the introduction of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997. These letters relate mainly to one particular brand of fireworks.

Retailers have been informed that, following discussions between the DTI and the Health and Safety Executive, the latter has issued a Certificate of Exemption to facilitate the safe return to suppliers of stocks of the prohibited fireworks which have been taken out of their original transport packaging. The trade associations representing retailers and the firework industry have been informed that an Exemption Certificate has been issued.

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to prohibit the sale of further categories of fireworks; and if she will make a statement. [38412]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 which I made in September 1997 introduced firework safety measures in two stages.

From October 1997 the minimum age for people who can be sold fireworks was raised from 16 to 18 and large bangers, flash bangers, Chinese Crackers, fireworks with erratic flight, aerial shells, maroons and other large fireworks were banned from sale to the public.

Further measures came into effect on 31 December 1997. These included:

- prohibiting the sale to the public of all other types of bangers and mini-rockets;
- limits on the size of fireworks such as Roman Candles which can be sold to the public;
- a new age use warning on packets of sparklers.

The measures taken since the election have contributed to the largest fall in fireworks injuries for 23 years.

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the level of fireworks stocks currently held by retailers in the United Kingdom which fall within the recently banned categories; and if she will make a statement. [38410]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Precise details of stocks of fireworks which may no longer be sold to the general public are not available. The proposals for safety regulations to prohibit certain fireworks were published in mid-June 1997 and sent to a wide range of companies, as well as to organisations representing retailers and other interests. The proposals, which received widespread publicity in the national press and on television, were also sent direct to all major firework suppliers to ensure that they were in a position to offer advice about possible changes in the law before deliveries of fireworks commenced for the 1997 firework season.

EU Internal Market Council

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what topics were discussed at the EU Ministerial Council on the Internal Market on 30 March; and what matters were voted upon. [38769]

Mrs. Beckett: My noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe chaired the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 30 March. My hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs occupied the UK seat.

The Council held a debate on three key issues of the Single Market Action Plan; implementation of the Plan, the state of transposition, application and effective implementation of internal market legislation, and the functioning of the principle of mutual recognition, on which it agreed formal conclusions. The Council also assessed progress on the initiative "Simpler Legislation for the Internal Market" (SLIM) and endorsed Commission proposals to establish Business Test Panels through which business will be consulted about selected new EU draft legislation.

The Council held an extensive exchange of views on the proposal for a Regulation creating a Commission intervention mechanism for the elimination of certain obstacles to trade. The Council expressed its resolve to find, urgently, an effective solution to the problem.

The Council took note of the progress achieved on the draft Regulation on the Statute for a European Company and gave its support to continuing work along the present lines.

The Council heard presentations from the Commission on: the proposed Directive on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the Information

Society, the Communication on Public Procurement, the Communication on Commercial Communications, and The Year 2000 Computer Problem.

The Council took note of the Memorandum "Creating a European Community and international environment to develop electronic commerce" presented by the French delegation.

No voting took place at this Council.

Working Time and Young Workers Directives

Mr. Rooney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress is being made in implementing the EC directives on working time and young workers. [38770]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have today issued a consultation document which contains draft regulations to implement the Working Time Directive and the Young Workers Directive as far as it relates to adolescents.

The measures will create protection for workers from being required to work over an average of 48 hours a week; the entitlement to paid annual leave and daily, weekly and in-work rest periods; limits on night working; and special protections for young people.

The consultation period will last until 5 June. We will then consider the responses before drafting any changes to the regulations. A new order will then be laid before Parliament. We aim to have the measures in place by 1 October.

HEALTH

London Lighthouse

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of London Lighthouse. [38433]

Ms Jowell: We are aware of the decision by the London Lighthouse Council of Management to resite the Lighthouse's day care and other support services for people with HIV and AIDS in new premises from September 1998 and that this will involve the closure of its residential unit and the sale of its Lancaster Road building. This option was identified following extensive discussions between London Lighthouse and Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority to identify a viable option for restructuring the Lighthouse's services in view of the financial difficulties it faces. The Lighthouse, like many other HIV and AIDS voluntary organisations, has been responding to changes in service requirements for people with HIV and AIDS which have been identified through local needs assessment and the need to maximise value for money, and, more recently, taking into account the effects of combination therapies, results from which so far are very encouraging in delaying the progression of HIV and the onset of AIDS.

I have met twice with the London Lighthouse to be advised about its position and I welcome the work which the London Lighthouse has done with Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority to identify an option which seeks to safeguard the London Lighthouse's day care and other support services. Work is in hand to identify the practical implications of this option. Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster have agreed in principle to provide transitional funding to support the option, subject to public accountability requirements and a robust business case which meets the necessary financial conditions.

The Lighthouse has made a valuable contribution over the years to raise awareness and change attitudes to HIV and AIDS, and has continued to play a national role in the development of policy and services for people with HIV and AIDS in changing circumstances created by new treatments. I have agreed in principle to repeat its grant of £150,000 for 1998/99, bringing the total financial support provided by the Department over the years to the Lighthouse to more than £4 million.

NHS Trust Appointments

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appointments he announced to NHS trusts in North East England excluding Yorkshire in the week ending 3 April; how many of those appointed were declared to be present or past Labour councillors or Labour activists; and how many were councillors or activists of any other party. [38537]

Mr. Milburn: Full details of the people appointed to National Health Service trusts boards in the north east in the week beginning 3 April 1998 were made public in a press release issued by the NHS Executive Northern and Yorkshire Regional Office on 31 March 1998. Copies of the press release have been placed in the Library.

Adoption

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he plans to ratify the Hague Convention on adoption; [25805]

(2) what funds have been made available to agencies specialising in intercountry adoption in line with the Hague Convention. [25813]

Mr. Boateng: No funds have been made available by the Department of Health to voluntary adoption societies to provide intercountry adoption services.

The 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption will be ratified as soon as the necessary legislation is enacted and implemented.

The approval of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State will be recommended for societies who meet the standards and criteria set out by the Department and which encompass the principles underpinning the 1993 Hague Convention on intercountry adoption.

Private Health Care

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates he has made of *(a)* the number of patients treated privately each year and *(b)* the impact of this on the size of NHS waiting lists; [36730]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of patients treated privately in each of the last three years. [36467]

Mr. Milburn: The information for in-patient treatment in National Health Service hospitals is as follows. Information shown is based on finished consultant episodes, which represent the number of episodes of care under individual consultants. There are known shortfalls and data quality problems in the provisional 1996/97 data which are currently being investigated.

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined: completed episodes (FCEs) of private patients treated in NHS hospitals

Year	*FCEs*
1993–94	93,048
1994–95	99,359
1995–96	107,182
1996–97	89,831

Notes:

Data for 1993–94 to 1995–96 are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Data for 1996–97 are provisional and are derived from ungrossed HES data.

Information on the number of patients treated in the independent sector is not collected. Professor Brian Williams looked at the activity of short stay independent hospitals in 1992–93. The results of his survey were published in the British Medical Journal on 25 June 1994 (BMJ 1994;308:18699–701).

We have made no estimate of the impact on NHS waiting lists. This will depend on how far patients treated privately would otherwise have been accepted for treatment under the NHS.

Frozen Embryos

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many frozen embryos are currently in storage in the United Kingdom. [37272]

Ms Jowell: This figure is not available. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 requires clinics to notify the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) when embryos are stored or used. There are some embryos which were stored before the 1990 Act came into force. Clinics were not required to notify the HFEA of these.

According to the most recent verified information held by the HFEA between 1 August 1991 to 31 March 1996 the number of embryos put into frozen storage during the course of an IVF treatment cycle was 105,317. The number of female patients who stored embryos from IVF cycles during that period was 17,254.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to NHS trusts to reduce waiting lists for essential medical care. [37259]

Mr. Milburn: In reducing waiting lists we remain committed to the principles that the National Health Service must retain the capacity to respond promptly and effectively to emergencies and that clinical priority and the urgency of a patient's condition are the main factors which should determine how long patients on waiting lists wait for treatment. We have set the target that by April 1999 there will be fewer patients awaiting admission to hospital in England than the 1.16 million we inherited after the election. This will be the stepping stone to meeting our election pledge to reduce waiting lists to 100,000 below the level we inherited by the end of the present Parliament. £320 million of the extra £500 million for the NHS announced in the Budget will be spent directly on cutting waiting lists. Every health authority and trust will have to play their part and will be set an individual, challenging waiting list target to meet by 31 March 1999.

General Practitioners (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the number of general practitioners in Sunderland; and if he will make a statement. [37864]

Mr. Milburn: We have introduced a number of national policy measures to improve the recruitment of general practitioners which Sunderland Health Authority has been

implementing locally. The health authority has recently introduced a career start scheme and has successfully recruited two salaried GPs to commence work in the near future. It also intends filling two additional GP posts under this initiative later this year. The Priority Healthcare Wearside National Health Service Trust has employed a salaried GP under the NHS (Primary Care) Act 1997 Pilot scheme to provide personal medical services to the residents of the Pennywell area. A third out-of-hours centre to provide GP services through the night also became operational in January 1998.

NHS Road Fuel

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of expenditure on road fuel in the NHS for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [37840]

Mr. Milburn: The available information covers expenditure on the road fuel usage covering approximately 90 per cent of the National Health Service. This is in the table.

£

	Derv	*Unleaded*	*4 star*	*Total*
1997–98				
Bulk purchases				
Litres	12,787,000	669,000	1,270,000	14,726,000
Average price[1]	49.87	49.85	54.67	—
Total cost	6,376,800	333,500	694,300	7,404,600
Total cost inc. VAT	7,492,700	391,900	815,800	8,700,400
Retail purchases				
Litres	6,000,000	6,000,000	3,000,000	15,000,000
Average price[1]	62.49	62.38	68.30	—
Total cost	3,749,400	3,742,800	2,049,000	9,541,200
Grand total cost all purchases	11,242,100	4,134,700	2,864,800	18,241,600
1998–99				
Bulk purchases				
Litres	12,787,000	669,000	1,270,000	14,726,000
Average price[1]	53.98	53.30	58.57	—
Total cost	6,902,400	356,600	743,800	8,002,800
Total cost inc. VAT	8,110,300	419,000	874,000	9,403,300
Retail purchases				
Litres	6,000,000	6,000,000	3,000,000	15,000,000
Average price[1]	67.68	66.37	72.97	—
Total cost	4,060,800	3,982,200	2,189,100	10,232,100
Grand total cost all purchases	12,171,100	4,401,200	3,063,100	19,635,400

[1] Pence (p).

Notes:

In addition to the above figures, NHS Supplies' Wholesaling Division's transport fleet spent approximately £1.33 million on fuel costs (almost exclusively Derv) in 1997–98 and estimate this will rise to £1.47 million in 1998–99.

The figures for bulk are for England and Northern Ireland, but the retail figures are for England only. This said the element in the bulk figures relating to Northern Ireland is small.

Retail purchase costs above include VAT as transactions are made at commercial petrol stations.

All figures have been rounded.

There are several issues that make estimates difficult for 1998–99. These are:

- budget duty changes will have an effect on demand
- oil is a commodity traded in US$ and, as such, is subject to global supply/demand fluctuations as well as currency fluctuations
- oil companies, despite being nationally recognised names, are becoming increasingly regionalised around their terminals eg Esso in the far south, Total in Yorkshire and Humberside and so on. In the supply of bulk, this regionalisation can be clearly seen and it is likely to become increasingly obvious in the retail sector as well. This regionalisation will have an effect on costs across the country. There were also a number of oil company partnerships and take overs last year and this trend is expected to continue.

New Variant CJD

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has evaluated into the correlations between the genetic changes in the prion protein of humans and the various routes of prion infection. [37870]

Ms Jowell: Apart from cases of iatrogenic Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease linked to medical interventions, the route of infection for human prion diseases is not known. There are currently no research findings to link directly the route of infection with the type of prion protein seen in human prion diseases.

The National CJD Surveillance Unit investigates the make-up of the prion protein gene in individuals affected by all types of CJD in parallel with their detailed surveillance activities. This work is ongoing and designed to give as much information as possible about potential routes of transmission and the genetic make-up of all individuals affected by the various types of CJD.

The most significant research into identifying different strains of Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs) published so far are:

"Molecular analysis of prion strain variation and the aetiology of new variant CJD" (Collinge et al, *Nature* 383, 24 October 1996)

"Transmission to mice indicate that "new variant" CJD is caused by the BSE agent" (Bruce et al, *Nature*, 389, 2 October 1997)

"The same prion strain causes nvCJD and BSE" (Hill, Collinge et al, *Nature* 389, 2 October 1997).

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee considered the two sets of findings published in *Nature* on 2 October 1997 and concluded that they provided convincing evidence that the agent which causes nvCJD is the same as that which causes BSE. However the findings do not tell us anything about the mechanism by which nvCJD patients contracted the disease.

East Kent Health Authority

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many East Kent patients, and at what cost, were referred for treatment outside East Kent during 1997 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by each of the district general hospitals; [38196]

(2) for the last full year for which data is available, if he will itemise expenditure outside East Kent by East Kent Health Authority according to the particular specialism or treatment category; [38198]

(3) what was the total cost of referring East Kent patients for treatment outside East Kent in each year since East Kent Health Authority was set up; and what allowance has been made for the *(a)* current and *(b)* future years. [38197]

Mr. Milburn: This information is not held centrally and should be requested directly from East Kent Health Authority.

Healthy Living Centres

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways voluntary sector organisations will be involved in the operation of healthy living centres. [38202]

Ms Jowell: There will be the opportunity for voluntary sector organisations to play a significant role in delivering the healthy living centres initiative. Centres will be able to involve a range of partnerships at local level, for example the voluntary, public and private sectors working with each other, local general practitioners and local people. The scheme is designed to be flexible so that projects can be specifically tailored to meet the different needs of different communities.

Private Beds

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* total number of beds and *(b)* number of private beds in each health authority in the North Thames region of the NHS. [38374]

Mr. Milburn: The number of beds in each health authority in the North Thames region is shown in the table.

Information on the number of private beds is not collected. The last year of collection of any information on private beds was in 1990/91 and was collected from district health authorities and special health authorities.

Average daily number of available beds in wards open night and day (i.e. 24 hours) by health authority in the North Thames Regional Office area for the financial year 1996–97

Health Authority[1]	*Average daily number of available beds*[2] *(all ward classes)*
Barking & Havering	1,705
Barnet	1,487
Brent & Harrow	1,520
Camden & Islington	3,526
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow	2,628
East London & The City	3,232
Enfield & Haringey	1,686
Hillingdon	684
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	2,812
North & East Hertfordshire	1,299
North Essex	3,365
Redbridge & Waltham Forest	2,346
South Essex	2,025
West Hertfordshire	1,998

[1] Health authority figures have been created from trust figures where the trust's main site is located within the health authority. The information on the main site of the trust and its health authority is based upon NHS organisation codes, derived from trust information. Some trusts have hospital sites which cross health authority boundaries. Therefore, the figures will not reflect the true position for the number of beds within each health authority area.

[2] Figures exclude neonatal cots in materoity wards and beds in residential care, but include paediatric intensive care beds.

Source:

KHO3 Bed availability and occupancy 1996–97. Trust location—National Health Service organisation codes.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* total number of beds and *(b)* number of private beds, in each region of the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [38373]

Mr. Milburn: Information on National Health Service beds is set out in the table. Information on the number of private beds in NHS hospitals was last collected from district health authorities and special health authorities in 1990/91 when there were 2,956 authorised private beds in NHS hospitals.

Average daily number of available beds in wards open night and day (i.e. 24 hours) by regional office area for the financial year 1996–97

Regional office area	*Average daily number of available beds*[1] *(all ward classes)*
Northern & Yorkshire	28,461
Trent	19,957
Anglia & Oxford	19,607
North Thames	30,314
South Thames	25,126
South & West	26,374
West Midlands	20,308
North West	28,810
England	198,958

[1] Figures exclude neonatal cots in maternity wards and beds in residential care, but include paediatric intensive care beds.

Source:

KH03 Bed availability and occupancy 1996–97.

Midwives

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include midwives in the recommended structure of primary care groups. [38194]

Mr. Boateng: We have made clear in the White Paper *The New NHS* and in the guidance we have issued on establishing primary care groups, that we expect all community nurses and general practitioners to work together in partnership if the new arrangements are to succeed. Community nurses will also be represented in the governing arrangements of the primary care groups but it is a matter for community nurses locally, working with their health authority and general practitioners, to decide exactly how they will be represented.

Hearing Damage

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government have taken to study the extent of damage to people's hearing from loud music in public places. [38176]

Mr. Boateng: We have commissioned no research into damage to people's hearing from loud music in public places. However, the Medical Research Council Institute of Hearing Research is currently carrying out a study entitled "hearing in young adults" which shows that for young people aged 18–25, leisure noise has increased by 200 per cent. since the 1980s. There is no evidence yet that the hazard is leading to a direct reduction in hearing function, but there is an increase in tinnitus.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department will take to remove cash disincentives to breast units achieving breast cancer screening rates of more than 10 per cent. in women aged over 65 years; [38149]

(2) what rate of take-up of breast cancer screening in women aged over 65 years current levels of funding can support; [38155]

(3) if the Government makes additional resources available to breast screening units when uptake in the over 65 years age group exceeds 10 per cent. locally. [38539]

Ms Jowell: The National Health Service breast screening programme invites women aged 50–64 for screening by mammography every three years, with screening for older women available three-yearly on request.

When the breast screening programme was set up, funding was provided centrally. Subsequently, the money for breast screening was included in general allocations to health authorities and it is therefore for health authorities to make available the necessary resources for this service.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the uptake rate for breast cancer screening in women aged over 65 years; [38153]

(2) what plans the Government have to increase the uptake rate for breast cancer screening in women aged over 65 years. [38148]

Ms Jowell: The Government are keen to encourage women aged 65 and over to request free three-yearly mammograms, and their entitlement to do so is widely publicised. In particular, the National Health Screening breast screening programme is working with Age Concern to encourage older women to request screening. They have produced a leaflet called "65 or over: You are still entitled to breast screening", which is widely available from general practitioners surgeries, clinics, some post offices and some shops. In addition, women who have already been screened through the programme are informed of their right to request free three-yearly screening after the age of 64.

The number of women aged 65 and over being screened has risen from 39,000 two years ago to over 57,000 last year. We are delighted that more and more women are making use of this important service.

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what functions are ascribed to the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting under section 6(1) (e) of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997; and if the Board received funding in respect of those functions. [38712]

Mr. Milburn: The Board is required to provide a careers service (Statutory Instrument 1993/629). Funding for this is not authorised by statute and is the subject of separate approval by the Treasury until March 1999, after which new arrangements will be introduced.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department collates in respect of the caseloads of community psychiatric nurses. [38170]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the caseloads of community psychiatric nurses is not collected centrally. The Department does collect the full-time equivalent totals of qualified nurses working in community psychiatry by National Health Service trust, as well as the number of first contacts per year. The ratio between the two gives the average number of patients seen per qualified nurse working in community psychiatry per year for each trust.

Smoking

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to reduce the take up rate of smoking amongst young women. [38224]

Ms Jowell: In 1998/99 the Government are funding a Health Education Authority run adult smoking education campaign costing £5.5 million, which identifies 5 key target groups, two of which are women and pregnant women aged 16 -24, and also fund a teenage smoking campaign costing £1 million which especially focuses on teenage girls (ages 11–15).

We are currently considering ways in which to reduce tobacco consumption and our conclusions will form part of the Tobacco Control White Paper, which will be published later this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions his Department has taken to increase public awareness of the short-term and long-term effects of passive smoking on health. [38223]

Ms Jowell: The Department recently published (on 11 March 1998 by Press Conference) a report by the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health. The report describes the major issues considered by the committee, including the health effects of exposure of non-smokers to environmental tobacco smoke and lists the committee's conclusions and recommendations.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library and copies are available from the Stationery Office.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation to regulate smoking in public places. [38222]

Ms Jowell: We are currently considering what measures might be included in the Tobacco Control White Paper to be published later this year.

New Deal (Training)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance, in terms of extra resources and preparatory training, will be given to National Health Service trusts when recruiting new employees through the New Deal. [37998]

Mr. Milburn: Employees recruited through the new deal will receive the same induction and training as any new employee in the National Health Service. Employers participating in the scheme will receive a weekly subsidy for six months. A £750 allowance to support training, leading to a recognised qualification is also available. In addition the Employment Service offers practical help, advice and support to employers involved in new deal and aims to fill vacancies quickly, efficiently and appropriately when a job and person specification have been placed with them.

I wrote to health authority and NHS trust chairmen on 11 March in a joint letter with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights telling them of the benefits of the schemes and encouraging NHS employers to support the welfare to work programmes. The NHS Executive is issuing further guidance on the scheme and the benefits to the NHS.

Prescription Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the percentage of the over 60 years population who are regularly taking *(a)* one prescription drug, *(b)* two to four drugs, *(c)* five to six drugs, *(d)* seven to eight drugs and *(e)* nine or more drugs each week; [38362]

(2) if he will estimate the percentage of the over 60 years population who are found on admission to hospital to be regularly taking *(a)* one prescription drug, *(b)* two to four drugs, *(c)* five to six drugs, *(d)* seven to eight drugs and *(e)* nine or more drugs each week. [38361]

Mr. Milburn: Information on patients' medication handed in on admission to hospital is not available. There is no readily available information on the number of prescription drugs people take regularly. The available information from the health survey for England in 1996 is given in the table.

Number of prescribed medicines by age

percentage

	Age 65–74	*Age 75 and over*
One	20	17
Two	17	18
Three	14	16
Four or more	22	31

Prozac

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of the population have been prescribed prozac in each of the past five years; and if he will estimate the figures for the next five years under present trends. [38363]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of people who have been prescribed prozac over the past five years is not available. The number of prescription items dispensed in England for prozac for the period 1992 to 1996 and an estimate for 1997 to 2001 is shown in the table. Under present trends it is estimated that prozac dispensing will increase by about 0.5 million prescription items per year.

Number of prescription items dispensed for Prozac (fluoxetine hydrochloride) for 1992 to 1996 and an estimate for 1997 to 2001 England

Year	*Prescription items (millions)*
1992	0.6
1993	1.0
1994	1.4
1995	2.0
1996	2.5
1997	3.0
1998	3.5
1999	4.0
2000	4.5
2001	5.0

Notes:
The figures for 1992 to 1996 are based on a full analysis of all prescriptions dispensed in England in the community, ie by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.
The estimates for 1997 to 2001 are based on current trends.

Post-traumatic Stress

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that those traumatised through the death of a relative in a road crash are offered professional support to help treat post-traumatic stress. [38349]

Mr. Boateng: A range of services, including those which specialise in the treatment of post-traumatic stress, are available within the National Health Service. Decisions concerning the treatment required for particular patients remain the responsibility of the medical practitioner. Decisions are taken on the basis of a thorough and individual assessment, combined with evidence of the effectiveness of treatment.

Private Health Work

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the revenue generated by private work and *(b)* the proportion of the trust's annual revenue generated by private work in each year since 1990 by NHS trust. [37131]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 31 March 1998]:* The first National Health Service trusts were established in 1991. Information for each year from 1991–92 to 1996–97 has been placed in the Library.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of his Department's planned real level of expenditure on the National Health Service in 1995–96 prices in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99, using (i) the estimates of spending and of the GDP deflator as contained in the Financial Statement and Budget report 1997–98 and (ii) the estimates of spending and of the GDP deflator as contained in the Financial Statement and Budget report for March 1998. [37135]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* Figures on real terms expenditure on the National Health Service can be found in the Departmental Report, copies of which are available in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list, for each financial year since the CSA began its operations, how many parents with care have ceased to claim *(a)* income support, *(b)* income-based job-seeker's allowance, *(c)* family credit and *(d)* disability working allowance as a result of CSA activity; and for each of the above benefits if she will list how many claims ceased because of (i) established benefit fraud, (ii) fraud was suspected but not proved and (iii) the claim ceased, but no reason was investigated for the termination of the claim. [38403]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Number of parents with care who have ceased to claim Income Support within four weeks of CSA activity (or eight weeks if the question of the parent with care's requirement to apply for maintenance is under consideration)

	Number
1993–94	[1]41,000
1994–95	60,226
1995–96	52,848
1996–97	43,658
1997–98	[2]35,588

[1] Estimated.
[2] To the end of February 1998.

No information is available about the number of such cases where fraud was involved.

The information requested for parents with care ceasing to claim income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance is not available.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much parents with care on income support, whose claims predate April 1993, have *(a)* not been contacted by the CSA and *(b)* were contacted and whose case forms part of the CSA backlog; and by how many cases these numbers of claimants have been reduced in the financial year 1997–98. [38404]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Rendel, dated 8 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency cases that pre-date April 1993.

Some 340,000 cases were deferred in December 1994 where the client was in receipt of Income Support prior to April 1993 and where there had been no Agency contact, and a further 16,000 cases deferred in January–March 1995 where a maintenance application form had been issued before July 1994 and either had not been returned or lacked the necessary information.

The Agency recommenced take on of these cases in November 1995, in line with the agreement made with the Secretary of State to recommence take on by December 1995.

It is not possible to give an exact figure for the number of deferred cases still outstanding. To obtain this a clerical examination of all the deferred cases would have to be made to find those appropriate for action and this would incur disproportionate cost. In November 1997, it was estimated that the number outstanding had reduced to around 150,000 cases.

This reduction is due to a number of reasons. The recommencement of take on mentioned above; also, in some cases where Income Support has ceased and the parent with care has made a fresh application for benefit, the Agency will have become involved and these cases will have been taken on; in other cases the parent with care will have requested that the Agency take on the case and this will have been done; finally, some clients will no longer be claiming Income Support.

Where the Agency has taken-on cases, the length of time taken to complete a maintenance assessment is measured, and cases which exceed 52 weeks are considered to be a backlog; this backlog currently stands at approximately 113,000 from 225,000 at 31 March 1997.

The Agency has developed and is now implementing a strategy for meeting its undertaking to clear its backlogs. All Business Units have put in place operational plans which will guide them towards the achievement of our stated objective of clearing backlogs by 31 March 1999.

The Agency is tackling the backlog of cases. However, we must balance the demands placed on us—to deliver Secretary of State targets, to continue to improve performance and improve customer service—and clearance of the backlogs.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints were received in 1997 against the workings of the Child Support Agency. [36701]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We expect the Child Support Agency to provide a consistent, fair and efficient service to all its clients throughout the Child Support assessment process. In 1997 the number of complaints recorded by customer service managers of the Child Support Agency was 26,364. Correspondence received by Ministers in this

Department and by the Chief Executive of the Agency is not categorised to show the proportion that relates to complaints. However, in 1997 Ministers received 1,179 letters from hon. and right hon. Members concerning the operations of the Child Support Agency. Over the same period the Chief Executive of the Agency received 8,187 such letters.

We are looking closely at all aspects of the Child Support scheme to see where improvements can be made and we expect to bring forward a consultation paper on our proposals later this year.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of outstanding child maintenance debt, broken down according to debt considered *(a)* collectable and *(b)* uncollectable, giving reasons for such categorisation. [38397]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is not right that so many absent fathers should seek to avoid paying the maintenance which their children are due. An extra £15 million is to be invested in the Child Support Agency this year and next, specifically aimed at increasing the amounts of maintenance which are paid.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. David Rendel, dated 8 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about child maintenance debt.

The amount of child support full maintenance assessment debt outstanding as at the 31 March 1998, was £691,416,505.67. This has increased from the amount reported as outstanding at 31 March 1997 in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for 1996–97 which was £513,029,000. The increase in the amount of maintenance debt is largely a result of the rise of the Agency's live and assessed caseload, which has risen from 585,220 at 31 March 1997 to 758,580 at 31 March 1998.

The Agency undertakes a Debt Analysis exercise at the end of each financial year, which estimates the collectability of the amounts outstanding. The results as at 31 March 1997 for 1996–97 are shown in the table attached, with definitions of the classifications. A similar exercise will be undertaken for 1997–98 and the results will be published in the Agency's 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts in July 1998.

I hope this is helpful.

Child support debt: 31 March 1997

Analysis of debt	*Value of debt (£ million)*	*Percentage of debt*
Collectable	230.7	44.9
Possibly Uncollectable	81.3	15.9
Probably Uncollectable	195.0	38.0
Deferred debt	6.0	1.2
Total	513.0	100

Collectable—amount outstanding which the Debt Analysis exercise revealed is likely to be collected. This takes into account factors such as regular contact with the absent parent, where regular payments are being made or an arrears agreement has been set up.
Possibly Uncollectable—amount outstanding which the Debt Analysis exercise revealed some uncertainty over whether it will be collected. The amounts are considered doubtful where, for example, payments have been infrequent or it has not been possible to establish an arrears agreement or impose a deduction of earnings order.
Probably Uncollectable—amount outstanding which the Debt Analysis exercise revealed is likely to be very difficult to collect due, for example, to the lack of contact with or the personal circumstances of the absent parent. In many of the latter cases the Agency has suspended recovery action until such time as the individual's circumstances change.
Deferred Debt—amount outstanding which the Agency has been able to defer indefinitely, provided absent parents meet certain conditions on payment of regular maintenance and any remaining debt.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list for each CSA division the name and location of each field office, indicating those *(a)* closed and *(b)* subject to staff reduction since April 1997; and what plans there are to (i) close and (ii) reduce the number of staff in each remaining office in the financial year 1998–99. [38396]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are looking for substantial and sustained operational improvements from the Agency, in particular on getting more maintenance paid, reducing the backlog and improving customer service.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Mrs. Faith Boardman, the Chief Executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. David Rendel, dated 8 April 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency Field Offices.

I have placed a list of Agency offices by region, showing the information you have requested for the period from April 1997 in the library.

As I am sure you are aware, the Agency is in the process of reviewing its organisation to improve the service that we deliver. Our plans for re-organising are fully in line with the Government strategy of modernising the delivery of public services and reinforce more effectively parental responsibility. We believe our plans will increase compliance and the regularity of payment of maintenance and play an important part in helping lone parents return to work. It may help to explain some details of our current organisation to show how we plan to improve our accessibility to the public substantially.

The Agency currently has approximately 2900 staff working in Field offices throughout the country. In excess of 95% of those staff are engaged on backroom paper processing work so they do not have any face to face contact with the public at all and are no more accessible than those in the major processing centres. The number of staff years which are devoted to face-to-face contact is currently 120 which in many locations equates to fewer than one interview per day. We feel that this is not sufficient. Our restructuring will allow us to offer significantly more face to face contact on a peripatetic basis in a greater range of locations in conjunction with the Benefits Agency (with whom many of our clients are also concerned). At the same time we need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of other forms of contact with customers. We also need to improve our overall cost-efficiency sufficiently to keep pace with increases of 50% in our workloads over the next 3 years.

We know that many of our customers who are working prefer to deal with us by 'phone rather than be visited at home or interviewed in one of our offices. We are developing proposals on how we might re-focus our resources to cope with an increasing workload while at the same time seeking to increase and improve both our telephone and our face to face contact. Our current thinking is that we can move processing work into the Child Support Agency Centres and larger local centres to provide economies of scale and much better value for money. Processing paper in small offices is significantly more expensive and our restructuring will allow us to increase our overall range of customer contact, as well as keeping pace with workloads.

While we may not retain a permanent presence at all our present sites we will provide interview facilities at a larger range of local outlets. We know that a proportion of our customers will want to have face to face contact with us for a number of reasons although not necessarily at a DSS office. We are exploring a number of options which will include for example Citizens Advice Bureaux or other Government facilities to increase our accessibility to the public.

I hope this is helpful.

National Insurance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *394*, what rate of real increase in average earnings is assumed in her estimate that Class 1 National Insurance contribution rates would stay constant if pensions and linked benefits were uprated by earnings in April 1999. [35925]

Mr. Denham: The analysis used an assumption based on data and evidence available at the time of the Pre-Budget Report. Although the extra cost of uprating in line with earnings would be £260 million, the rounding conventions used to calculate National Insurance contributions mean that the difference between the earnings assumption and the price assumption leads to a cost which is insufficient to trigger a change in the National Insurance contribution rate for April 1999.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have paid employees' national insurance contributions in each of the last 20 years; and what information she has on the likely numbers paying in each of the next 20 years. [37547]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

The Department makes no estimates of the number of employees who are likely to pay National Insurance contributions in future years. However, the Government Actuary undertakes a Quinquennial Review of the operation of the Social Security Acts to estimate the rates of contribution likely to be required in future years to meet the costs of benefits provided for under the National Insurance Scheme. The assumed number of future contributors in his Report on the Third Quinquennial Review under Section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 published on 31 January 1995[1] was, in an average week, 22.7 million for the year 2000, 24.0 million for 2010 and 24.0 million for 2020.

The estimates for future years in the Government Actuary's report are based on a number of underlying economic and demographic assumptions. These include projections of the number of employees and self-employed people, assumptions about earnings and the level of the lower earnings limit and the level of unemployment. From these assumptions the Government Actuary derives the estimated average number of contributors in any week for future years. However, these estimates are not directly comparable with those for previous years given in the table. The figures in the table show the actual number of employees who paid some contributions during the tax year, and will therefore be higher than figures which show the weekly average.

Number of employees in Great Britain who paid National Insurance Contributions in each tax year, from 1978–79 to 1995–96

000

Tax year	*Number of contributors*
1978–79	23,684
1979–80	23,911
1980–81	23,074
1981–82	21,991
1982–83	21,502
1983–84	21,376
1984–85	21,431
1985–86	21,702
1986–87	21,908
1987–88	22,426
1988–89	22,961
1989–90	23,246
1990–91	23,180
1991–92	22,376
1992–93	21,894
1993–94	21,749
1994–95	22,022
1995–96	22,151

Notes:

1. Report by the Government Actuary on the Third Quinquennial Review under Section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC 160).
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Includes all employees who have paid Class 1 not-contracted out, contracted out and married women's reduced rate contributions in each tax year.

Source:

DSS: Lifetime Labour Market Database which contains a 1 per cent. sample from the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS) taken at February 1997.

Family Credit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost of providing *(a)* milk tokens and *(b)* free school meals to family credit recipients (i) in cash terms and (ii) as a percentage of the total family credit budget. [36245]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

	Cash 1997–98 (£ millions)	*As a percentage of the Family Credit budget*
Cost of providing milk tokens to Family Credit recipients	50	Less than 0.5
Cost of providing free school meals to Family Credit recipients	200	Less than 1

Notes:

1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £50 million. The heavy rounding of the figures reflects uncertainties as to the exact cost of the provision, future take-up, and estimates of the numbers entitled.
2. No account has been taken of the fact that Family Credit recipients already receive the equivalent of milk tokens partly through an addition to their Family Credit benefit rates for purchasing liquid milk and partly through being able to purchase infant formula at NHS clinics at a reduced rate. In addition, provision is made in Family Credit for the replacement cash value of free school meals.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps the Government are taking to maximise take-up by eligible pensioner households of winter fuel payments; [36474]

(2) what estimate he has made of the proportion of pensioner households which will take up their entitlement to winter fuel payments. [36470]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel Payments are paid automatically without the need to claim, therefore take up is not an issue. Almost 10 million eligible pensioners, in over seven million households, have been identified from Departmental records. Each of these eligible pensioners should now have received a payment, at a total cost of around £200 million.

The award letter which accompanies the payment clearly explains the entitlement conditions and informs anyone who receives a £10 payment, but satisfies the conditions for a £20 payment, to contact the Benefits Agency Office which deals with their pension, or to telephone the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline, and request the balance. Requests for a review of the original decision to pay £10 are being dealt with as a matter of priority.

Similarly, where someone believes that they are entitled to a payment, but have not received one, they are advised in the Winter Fuel payment leaflet "Some extra layers to help keep pensioners warm this winter" to contact their local benefits Agency office to check. They may also contact the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for what reasons Dr. and Mrs. Michael Norris of Broom Knolls, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex, were paid two winter fuel payments; and if she will make a statement; [35383]

(2) how many households have received winter fuel payments in excess of their entitlement; and what measures are being taken to recover excess payments. [35384]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in winter. A total of £400 million has been committed for this winter and next, to help pensioners with fuel bills to a pay. This is the first time any Government have provided additional help with heating costs to all pensioners receiving a Retirement Pension or one of a number of other qualifying benefits.

The making of this winter's payments has been an enormous and unprecedented exercise. In order to establish all eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data in around 15 million computer records, involving 15 qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Overall, almost ten million payments will have been made to over seven million pensioner households by the end of March.

The administration of winter fuel payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 8 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary questions asking for what reasons Dr. and Mrs. Michael Norris of Broom Knolls, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex, were paid two winter fuel payments; and how many households have received winter fuel payments in excess of their entitlement; and what measures are being taken to recover excess payments.

The making of almost ten million winter fuel payments to over seven million pensioner households before the end of March 1998 has been a challenging task for the Benefits Agency. This will have been achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

Around one and a half million of the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, received their payment of £50 during January.

Other eligible pensioners are entitled to a payment of £20 or £10. Where they live alone, are the only eligible pensioner in a household, or are of no fixed abode, they are entitled to £20; otherwise, they are entitled to £10.

In order to establish other eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to match around fifteen million computer records, involving fifteen qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Where only one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £20 was made. Where more than one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £10 was made.

Where official Departmental records are not correct or incomplete, it is possible that the amount of some payments may not correspond with the actual circumstances. For example, where two eligible pensioners live at the same address but in separate households. In such cases, each eligible person will have been sent a payment of £10 when they should have received £20. The award letter which accompanies the payment clearly explains the entitlement conditions and informs anyone who receives a £10 payment, but satisfies the conditions for a £20 payment, to contact the Benefits Agency Office which deals with their pension, or to telephone the Winter Fuel Helpline, and request the balance. Requests for a review of the original decision to pay £10 are being dealt with as a matter of priority.

Where two eligible pensioners live at the same address and in the same household, but the address details held on the relevant benefit computer records are incorrect or incomplete for either or both of them, the matching exercise may not identify more than one eligible person at the address recorded. In accordance with the provisions of the legislation each are entitled to a payment of £20. There is no overprovision in such instances, but any voluntarily offer to repay any amount would be accepted. When an erroneous payment has been made or payment issued for an incorrect amount, appropriate action will be taken regarding the excess/over payment.

In the case to which you refer, we have not been able to identify the couple named. However, we have identified two people with a similar name to those given who were not identified as living at the same address in the matching process due to differences on their computer records. We have no record of making any payments to the named persons you have asked about, but I will investigate further and reply separately on this matter.

So far, fewer than 10,000 of the £50 payments made during January have been identified as being incorrectly made. I am unable at present to provide you with information which takes into account payments of £20 or £10 made incorrectly. This is due to the fact that these payments are still in the process of being issued. It is anticipated that this information will be available some time after the end of April. I will provide the information on excess entitlement once it is available.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the position.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner couples erroneously received two cold weather payments; and how many have repaid the extra amount. [37838]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in the winter. A total of £400 million has been committed for two years (1997–98 and 1998–99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay. This is the first time any Government have provided additional help with heating costs to all pensioners living in the United Kingdom who receive a retirement pension or one of a number of other qualifying benefits.

The making of this year's payments has been an enormous and unprecedented exercise. In order to establish all eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data in around 15 million computer records, involving 15 qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Overall, almost ten million pensioners, in over seven million households, have received a payment.

The administration of winter fuel payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory, dated 8 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recently parliamentary question asking how many pensioner couples erroneously received two cold weather payments; and how many have repaid the extra amount.

The making of winter fuel payments to almost ten million eligible pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 has been a challenging task for the Benefits Agency. This will have been achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

Around one and half million of the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, received their payment of £50 during January. Other eligible pensioners are entitled to a payment of £20 or £10. Where they live alone, are the only eligible pensioner in a household, or are of no fixed abode, they are entitled to £20; otherwise, they are entitled to £10, including each person in a pensioner couple if they are both in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

In order to establish other eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data in around fifteen million computer records, involving fifteen qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems.

Where only one eligible person was identified as living at an address, a payment of £20 was made. Where more than one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £10 was made.

Where official Departmental records are incorrect or incomplete, it is possible that some payments may not correspond with actual circumstances. For example, there are cases where two eligible pensioners live at the same address and in the same household, but the address details held on the relevant benefit computer records are incorrect or incomplete for either or both of them. In such cases, the data correlation exercise may not have identified more than one eligible person at an address and, in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, each are entitled to a payment of £20. There is no overprovision in such instances, but any voluntarily offer to repay any amount would be accepted. When an erroneous payment has been made or payment issued for an incorrect amount due to fraudulent intent, recovery of the excess/over payment will be considered.

I am unable, at present, to provide you with information on the number of incorrect payments and will write to you again once it is available.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the position.

Incapacity and Disability Benefits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled people living in the Greater London area were awaiting appeals against reductions in *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* disability living allowance on 1 March. [36582]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not available.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if she will instruct the Independent Tribunal Service to respond to the inquiries from the hon. Member for Chorley made by fax on 20, 23 and 24 March on behalf of a constituent; [36943]

(2) what percentage of telephone calls are answered by the Independent Tribunal Service within three minutes; [36945]

(3) if she will make a statement on the time taken by the Independent Tribunal Service headquarters to respond to requests for assistance on benefits matters from *(a)* the public and *(b)* hon. Members; [36944]

(4) how many complaints she has received concerning response times of the Independent Tribunal Service in Nottingham in the last year. [36946]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The operation of the appeals system is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS).

ITS report that a response to my hon. Friend's fax was sent by its Nottingham office on Friday 27 March 1998.

The time taken to respond to inquiries varies according to the nature and complexity of the individual enquiry. All inquiries, from whatever source, are answered normally within two weeks.

Information regarding the percentage of telephone calls answered within three minutes are not kept and information about the number of complaints received regarding response times is not available.

We are determined to reduce the current delays and complexity in the appeals system. The Social Security Bill, which paves the way for modernising the delivery of Social Security, including the handling of appeals, is currently being debated in Committee in the House of Lords. We shall assume responsibility for the administration of the appeals system. We shall set and publish demanding targets for the administration of appeals and report on the results.

Vaccine Damage

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the benefit entitlements of persons who have significant savings only as a result of receiving compensation for vaccine damage as children. [37093]

Mr. Denham: Any lump-sum payment made in consequence of a personal injury—which would include a vaccine damage payment—can be ignored providing it is held in a Trust. The normal rules on deprivation of capital do not apply to a person who puts money from such an award into a Trust. The treatment of payments from Trusts depends on the terms and nature of the Trust itself and the purpose and use of the payments. For example, a regular payment from a discretionary Trust can be fully disregarded provided it is intended and used for items other than normal day-to-day living expenses. These rules enable personal injury awards to be used for the benefit of the injured person without affecting income-related benefits. More generally, we will keep the operation of the income and capital rules under review as we develop the principles announced in the Welfare Reform Green Paper.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how she will ensure in reforming housing benefit that claimants are not exposed to the combination of high rents and low benefit. [37346]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are reviewing rent and Housing Benefit policy as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review on Housing and in line with our welfare reform objectives. Our aim continues to be to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the cost of housing benefit payments in each of the last 15 years *(a)* in total and *(b)* per tenant for (i) council tenants, (ii) housing association tenants and (iii) private tenants. [37543]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Information is not available on the cost per tenant in each year, and is therefore expressed in terms of average weekly benefit per tenant.

Total housing benefit expenditure, Great Britain

£ millions

Year	*Rent rebate expenditure (council tenants)*	*Total rent allowance expenditure*[1]	*Estimated rent allowance expenditure (Housing association tenants)*[2]	*Estimated rent allowance expenditure (Non-HA private tenant)*[2]
1982–83	1,777	351	n/a	n/a
1983–84	1,980	536	n/a	n/a
1984–85	2,145	687	n/a	n/a
1985–86	2,296	881	n/a	n/a
1986–87	2,419	996	n/a	n/a
1987–88	2,506	1,030	n/a	n/a
1988–89	2,718	1,055	n/a	n/a
1989–90	2,940	1,359	n/a	n/a
1990–91	3,368	1,779	n/a	n/a
1991–92	4,068	2,426	n/a	n/a
1992–93	4,617	3,284	730	2,554
1993–94	5,025	4,188	991	3,197
1994–95	5,246	4,874	1,333	3,541
1995–96	5,440	5,445	1,603	3,842
1996–97	5,636	5,887	1,959	3,928

Sources:

1. Public Expenditure White Papers (PEWP).
2. Departmental Reports.
3. Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Notes:

[1] Includes Supplementary Benefit Component for 1982–83.

[2] Based on Housing Benefit Management Information System 1 per cent. sample.

Average weekly housing benefit expenditure per tenant, Great Britain

£ per week

Year	*Rent rebate (council tenants)*	*Rent allowance (private tenants including HA)*	*Rent allowance (housing association tenants)*	*Rent allowance (other private tenants)*
1982–83	9.56	7.94	n/a	n/a
1983–84	10.22	10.18	n/a	n/a
1984–85	11.04	12.26	n/a	n/a
1985–86	11.93	14.76	n/a	n/a
1986–87	12.48	16.23	n/a	n/a
1987–88	13.12	16.54	n/a	n/a
1988–89	15.85	18.78	n/a	n/a
1989–90	17.36	21.06	n/a	n/a
1990–91	19.80	25.45	n/a	n/a
1991–92	22.76	32.57	n/a	n/a
1992–93	26.46	38.45	32.24	41.07
1993–94	28.94	43.61	35.75	46.14
1994–95	30.74	47.28	39.52	51.54
1995–96	33.09	50.49	43.10	52.42
1996–97	34.56	52.41	45.29	56.91

Source:

1. Public expenditure white papers (PEWP).
2. Departmental reports.
3. Housing benefit management information system.
4. 1988 onwards, DSS housing benefit management information system 1 per cent. sample.

Notes:

1. No separate estimate of Housing Benefit expenditure for Housing Association and Other Private Tenants are available before the 1992–93 financial year as this tenure type was not separately collected before May 1992.
2. The rent rebate figures include new town tenants as well as council tenants.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is her estimate of the cost of housing benefit fraud in the most recent year for which figures are available. [37544]

Mr. Denham: The first Housing Benefit review, in 1995, estimated the overall cost of incorrectness in Housing Benefit to be around £1 billion: this estimate includes confirmed and suspected fraud, as well as claimant and official error. The Department is currently conducting a further review to update that estimate.

Together with local authorities, we have taken significant steps to tackle Housing Benefit fraud, but more needs to be done. We made it clear in our Green Paper "New ambitions for our country: A contract for welfare reform" that rooting out fraud is an essential part of welfare reform. We have set up a fundamental review of the Department's counter-fraud strategy and are looking to strengthen each part of it, through earlier prevention, more effective deterrence, better detection.

Benefits System

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what part she intends that local authorities will play in the development of the modernised benefits system. [37345]

Mr. Field: We want to develop a Social Security system that promotes the wider aims of welfare reform: work for those who can; security for those who cannot. Local authorities have an important part to play in this process and we are consulting them on our proposals in the Green Paper—"New ambitions for our country: a contract for welfare reform".

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many beneficiaries there are currently receiving industrial injuries disablement benefit. [37513]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows. At 5 April 1997, it is estimated that there were 262,300 Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit assessments in payment. This figure will include some people who receive benefit for more than one injury or disease.

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total payment of industrial injuries disablement benefit over the last 12 months. [37512]

Mr. Denham: Expenditure on Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit in 1996–97 was £685 million.

The latest estimate for expenditure on Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit in 1997–98 is £695 million.

The figures for 1996–97 are consistent with the appropriation accounts for that year and those for 1997–98 have been taken from the 1998 Social Security Departmental Report.

State Pension

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total cost of the state pension in each of the last 20 years; and if she will estimate on future costs for each of the next 20 years assuming they continue to be uprated in line with prices as at present and inflation at 2.5 per cent. [37545]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Total cost of state pension in each of the last 20 years

£ billion

	Retirement pensions
1978–79	7.6
1979–80	8.9
1980–81	10.6
1981–82	12.2
1982–83	13.6
1983–84	14.7
1984–85	15.3
1985–86	16.6
1986–87	17.8
1987–88	18.7
1988–89	19.3
1989–90	20.7
1990–91	22.7
1991–92	25.6
1992–93	26.7
1993–94	28.2
1994–95	28.8
1995–96	30.0
1996–97	32.0
1997–98	33.5
1998–99	35.6

1. The figures have been taken from 1998 Social Security Departmental Report and earlier publications in the series.
2. Estimates are in £billion in cash prices.
3. This table contains the only short-term forecasts currently available. Detailed Government expenditure plans for future years (1999–2000 to 2001–2002) will be published after the completion of the Comprehensive Spending Review

Estiamted future costs

£ billion

	2000—1	*2010–11*	*2020–21*
Retirement Pension expenditure in 1998–99 benefit rates	38.2	47.2	51.8
Retirement Pension expenditure (uprated at 2.5 per cent per annum) in cash	40.2	63.5	89.2

Notes:

1. The most recent long-term estimates are based on the Government Actuary's Department Quinquennial Review (HC 160) and Report on the Financial Provisions of the 1994 Pensions Bill (Cmnd.2714). Therefore they do not take account of subsequent changes or more recent information.
2. Within the relevant period the report gives estimates only for those years shown above.
3. The estimates are in £billion.
4. These estimates assume a 1.5 per cent. a year growth in real earnings. See Quinquennial Review for details of assumptions.
5. When the estimates are expressed in 1998–99 benefit rates, the rate of inflation is of no consequence.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the number of people in receipt of the state pension in each of the last 20 years; and what numbers are predicted to qualify in each of the next 20 years. [37546]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Forecasts for each of the next 20 years are not available. A short-term forecast is published in the 1998–99 Departmental Report and long-term forecasts were published in 1994–95 by the Government Actuary's Department.

Historical numbers and 1998–99 forecast of numbers in receipt of any components of State Pension

'000

Year	Numbers
November 1977	8,620
November 1978	8,776
November 1979	8,945
November 1980	9,118
November 1981	9,301
September 1982	9,395
September 1983	9,493
March 1984	9,532
September 1985	9,724
September 1986	9,859
September 1987	9,943
September 1988	9,998
March 1989	9,997
September 1990	10,173
September 1991	10,227
September 1992	10,271
September 1993	10,269
September 1994	10,297
September 1995	10,411
September 1996	10,564
September 1997	10,709
1998–99	10,661

1. Historical information is based on administrative data on the payment of pensions.
2. The 1998–99 forecast is taken from the "1998 Social Security Department Report" and is an average across the year. Short-term forecasts for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 will be published after the completion of the Government Comprehensive Spending Review.
3. Estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Long-term forecasts of numbers in receipt of basic State Pension

'000

Year	Estimated numbers
2000–01	10,950
2010–11	12,360
2020–21	12,370

1. These estimates are taken from the Government Actuary's Department Quinquennial Review (HC 160) and Report on the Financial Provisions of the 1994 Pensions Bill (Cmnd.2714), which includes the effects of equalisation of State Pension Age. The former should be consulted for full details of underlying assumptions. Subsequent data have not been taken into account.
2. Within the relevant period the report gives estimates only for those years shown above.
3. Estimates are rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what *(a)* the original savings assumptions were and *(b)* the current savings assumptions are there for the Benefit Integrity Project in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000; [37930]

(2) what factors were taken into account in the revision of savings assumptions, for the Benefit Integrity Project for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [37929]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The original savings estimates show that for an investment of £11.5 million in each of the three years covered by the 1996 Public Expenditure Survey, savings were assumed as £27 million in 1997–98, £40 million in 1998–99 and £35 million in 1999–2000.

These savings estimates comprise £20 million/£30 million/£28 million from the targeted review and renewal activity undertaken by the Benefit Integrity Project and £7 million/£10 million/£7 million as a result of fraud detection activity in Disability Living Allowance generally.

The latest savings estimate for the Project alone is £5/40/40 million, and this is the figure included in the Department's Memorandum to the Social Security Select Committee. The estimated savings for the Project have fallen from £20 million to £5 million in the first year, largely because live running has shown that processing performance has been considerably slower than expected. Estimated savings for years two and three are higher than anticipated as a result of higher than expected average savings per case coupled with cases being pushed forward from year one. The original assumption was that 220,000 cases would be processed in each of the first two years. Monitoring data up to the end of December 1997 suggests that 60,00 cases will have been processed by the end of year one. The latest estimate is also based on the expectation that the Project will process 220,000 cases in year two.

The latest estimate does not take account of the impact of the additional safeguard introduced on 9 February on further evidence gathering. Nor does it include additional changes which Secretary of State and Baroness Hollis have decided to implement following consultation with the disability organisations. We will continue to work with the disability organisations and will monitor the effects of improvements.

A revised savings estimate for 1997–1998 and subsequent years will be produced when all the information up to the end of March has been received. These may need further revision as monitoring continues.

Lone Parents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list, from October 1999, the marginal tax rates which will apply to lone parents receiving *(a)* working families tax credit, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit for those with gross weekly earnings of (i) up to £49, (ii) £50 to £99, (iii) £100 to £149, (iv) £150 to £199, (v) £200 to £249, (vi) £250 to £299 and (vii) £300 and above. [38400]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table:

percentage

Weekly gross earnings (£s)	Working families tax credit (WFTC) only	WFTC and housing benefit (HB)	WFTC, HB and council tax benefit
25	0.00	65.0	85.0
75	10.0	68.5	86.5
125	68.5	89.0	95.3
175	69.9	89.4	95.5

Weekly gross earnings (£s)	Working families tax credit (WFTC) only	WFTC and housing benefit (HB)	WFTC, HB and council tax benefit
			percentage
225	69.9	89.4	95.5
275	69.9	89.4	95.5
300	69.9	89.4	95.5

1. All benefits have been uprated to 1998–99 prices.

2. The following assumptions have been made:

(a) The benefit unit is defined as being a lone parent with 2 children under the age of 11 working full-time.

(b) Given that Marginal Deduction Rates can vary within the specified income bands a mid-point for a measure of gross weekly earnings has been used.

(c) In order that the benefit unit is still entitled to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit at gross weekly earnings in excess of £300, housing costs at £90 per week and council tax liability at £28 per week have been used in the calculations.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many lone parents with children *(a)* under 11, and *(b)* aged 11 years and above, working more than 16 hours per week after 1 June 1998 will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in November 1998 by (i) up to £2.50, (ii) £2.51 to £5, (iii) £5.01 to £7.50, (iv) £7.51 to £10 and (v) £10.01 and above; and how many will remain unaffected; [38398]

(2) how many lone parents with children *(a)* under 11 and *(b)* aged 11 years and above, working more than 16 hours per week after 1 June 1998 will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in April 1999 by (i) up to £2.50, (ii) £2.51 to £5, (iii) £5.01 to £7.50, (iv) £7.51 to £10 and (v) £10.01 and above; and how many will remain unaffected. [38399]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in tables:

Number of lone parents with children under 11, and aged 11 years and above, working more than 16 hours per week after 1 June 1998 who will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in November 1998

Gain	Numbers lone parents with children under 11	Numbers lone parents with no children under 11
Unaffected	110,000	260,000
(i) up to £2.50	190,000	0
(ii) £2.51 to £5	60,000	0
(iii) £5.01 to £7.50	10,000	0
(iv) £7.50 to £10	5,000	0
(v) over £10	negligible	0

Source:

1995–96 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1998–99 earnings, prices and benefit levels. Caseload information reflects the position at the end of 1998–99.

Notes:

Numbers rounded to the nearest 5,000.

Number of lone parents with children under 11, and aged 11 years and above, working more than 16 hours per week after 1 June 1998 who will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in April 1999

Gain	Numbers lone parents with children under 11	Number of lone parents with no children under 11
Unaffected	265,000	180,000
(i) up to £2.50	110,000	75,000
(ii) £2.51 to £5	0	0
(iii) £5.01 to £7.50	0	0
(iv) £7.50 to £10	0	0
(v) over £10	0	0

Source:

1995–96 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1998–99 earnings, prices and benefit levels. Caseload information reflects the position at the end of 1998–99, and their gains at that date.

Notes:

1. Numbers rounded to the nearest 5,000.

2. Other Budget changes being implemented in April 1999, in particular changes to National Insurance and Married Couples Allowance, have not been included in the analysis.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many lone parents with children *(a)* under 11 and *(b)* aged 11 years and above, claiming income support after 5 April 1998 will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in November 1998 by (i) up to £2.50, (ii) £2.51 to £5, (iii) £5.01 to £7.50, (iv) £7.51 to £10 and (v) £10.01 and above; and how many will remain unaffected; [38401]

(2) how many lone parents with children *(a)* under 11 and *(b)* aged 11 years and above, claiming income support after 5 April 1998 will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in April 1999 by (i) up to £2.50, (ii) £2.51 to £5, (iii) £5.01 to £7.50, (iv) £7.51 to £10 and (v) £10.01 and above; and how many will remain unaffected. [38402]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the tables.

Number of lone parents with children under 11 and aged 11 years and above, claiming income support after 5 April 1988 who will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the budget and due to take effect in November 1998

Gain	Number of lone parents with children under 11	Lone parents with no children under 11
Unaffected	0	35,000
up to £2.50	135,000	0
£2.51 to £5	65,000	0
£5.01 to £7.50	20,000	0
£7.50 to £10	5,000	0
over £10	1,000	0

Source:

Longitudinal modelling based on Successive Income Support QSEs.

Notes:

1. Information based on the stock of Lone Parent to Income Support after 5 April 1998 at the end of 1998–99.

2. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Number of lone parents with children under 11 and aged 11 years and above, claiming income support after 5 April 1998 who will be better off as a result of the changes announced in the Budget and due to take effect in April 1999

Gain	*Numbers of lone parents with children under 11*	*Lone parents with no children under 11*
Unaffected	0	0
up to £2.50	225,000	35,000
£2.51 to £5	0	0
£5.01 to £7.50	0	0
£7.50 to £10	0	0
over £10	0	0

Source:
Longitudinal modelling based on Successive Income Support QSEs.
Notes:
1. Information based on the stock of new claimants at the end of 1998–99 and the value of their gains at that date.
2. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Child Maintenance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list for the last year for which figures are available the number of parents with care whose income exceeded their applicable amount through the receipt of child maintenance causing them no longer to be eligible for income support. [38395]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In 1996–97, the last full year for which figures are available, the child maintenance assessment was sufficient to move 2,083 parents with care off Income Support.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much housing benefit fraud was detected in each London borough in *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [35210

Mr. Denham: We have made it clear in our Green Paper "New ambitions for our country: A Contract for Welfare" that rooting out fraud is an essential part of welfare reform. Our principle is that the benefits system should encourage openness and honesty and that the gateways to benefit should be clear and enforceable. We have inherited a system which is seriously afflicted by fraud. As the Report by the Committee of Public Accounts on Housing Benefit fraud has shown, the old ways of tackling fraud do not work on their own. That is why we are completing a fundamental review of the Department's counter-fraud strategy and are looking to strengthen each part of it: earlier prevention, more effective deterrence, better detection. In the longer term, we can prevent fraud by designing benefit systems which minimise the scope for fraud.

Together with local authorities, we are already taking significant steps to address Housing Benefit fraud through, for instance: new powers for local authorities to tackle landlord fraud, and providing financial support for a special pilot local authority team in London which is already at work to root out organised landlord fraud across London borough boundaries; supporting new visiting drives by local authorities to root out fraud—over £1 million is being provided to London boroughs this year which is expected to generate more than 200,000 extra visits; a new framework of guidance being introduced this year, backed up with extra financial support, to help authorities check claims better and so prevent fraud; the new Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, whose inspection programme which has started recently will help raise standards in local authorities and the Department; and improved liaison arrangements and systems between the Benefits Agency and local authorities.

Data on the amount of Housing Benefit fraud detected by local authorities were not collected centrally before 1993–94. Tables showing (i) the amount of weekly benefit savings claimed in respect of Housing Benefit fraud and (ii) identified incorrect payments of Housing Benefit due to established fraud for the years 1993–94 to 1996–97 for each London local authority have been placed in the Library.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans her Department has to tackle benefit fraud in the London Borough of Hackney. [38409]

Mr. Denham: The Department has a wide range of measures in place for tackling benefit fraud nationwide, including in Hackney. We have set out in the Green Paper "A New Contract for Welfare" our three pronged approach to fraud consisting of improved detection, more effective deterrence, and better prevention. To that end we are reviewing our strategic objectives governing counter fraud work, and we expect to be in a position to announce the outcome of the Review shortly.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much housing benefit fraud has been detected in the London boroughs of (i) Hackney, (ii) Islington, (iii) Lambeth and (iv) Southwark; what is the estimated level of undetected housing benefit fraud in each borough; and what are the averages for fraud *(a)* detected and *(b)* undetected in Inner London boroughs. [38236]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Total weekly benefit savings claimed in respect of Housing Benefit Fraud in the London Boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark

£

Year	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Hackney	1,430,361	2,578,064	3,169,833	*4,143,503
Islington	590,141	2,789,116	3,880,685	3,847,251
Lambeth	938,690	*3,374,674	*3,395,282	n/a
Southwark	623,957	1,410,541	2,872,114	*2,681,445

Identified incorrect payments of housing benefit due to established fraud in the London boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark

£

Year	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Hackney	366,008	927,374	2,659,693	*3,707,881
Islington	440,355	381,667	283,758	*225,035
Lambeth	*1,645,499	*2,610,149	*2,156,130	n/a
Southwark	233,856	622,486	902,125	*1,040,057

1. The figures quoted in the above tables are taken from each local authority's certified Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit final subsidy claim. For some claims, qualifications raised by the auditor remain outstanding. The figures denoted by an asterisk are those where such qualification exists and which thus remain under scrutiny by the Department. A certified claim for the London Borough of Lambeth for the year 1996–97 remains outstanding.
2. Data on the amount of Housing Benefit fraud detected by local authorities were not collected centrally prior to 1993–94.
3. Weekly benefit savings are an estimate of the value of fraudulent payments which would have continued had the fraud not been detected.

n/a = not available.

Average Weekly Benefit savings claimed in respect of Housing Benefit fraud and average identified incorrect payments of Housing Benefit due to established fraud in the Inner London Boroughs

£ million

Year	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
(a) average weekly benefit savings	0.952	1.778	2.209	2.613
(b) average identified incorrect payments	0.408	0.697	0.858	1.004

1. The Inner London Boroughs comprise the Boroughs of Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster, and the Corporation of the City of London.
2. Averages have been calculated using figures taken from each local authority's certified Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit final subsidy claim; in some cases the figures used remain subject to qualification by the auditor.
3. The averages quoted are rounded to the nearest thousand.

The first Housing Benefit review, in 1995, estimated the overall cost of incorrectness in housing benefit to be around £1 billion: this estimate includes confirmed and suspected fraud, as well as claimant and official error. The Department is currently conducting a further review to update that estimate.

Claimants (Medical Examinations)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the total sum paid in each of the last five years to doctors for examining DSS claimants and appellants; [37534]

(2) What remuneration is paid, and how it is calculated, to doctors who examine claimants for DSS benefits and appeals; and if she will make a statement. [37535]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of the Benefits Agency Medical Services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Marshall, dated 7 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what remuneration is paid, and how is it calculated, to doctors who examine claimants for DSS benefits and appeals, and what is the total sum in each of the last five years to doctors for examining claimants and appellants.

Doctors who conduct examinations for Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance are paid £47.00 per home visit. Doctors conducting examinations for Incapacity Benefit/Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance are paid £30.70 per hour if the medical is performed at a BA Medical Centre, and £37.90 per one and a half hours if the medical is performed by the visit to the customer's address. In addition, doctors are paid £37.90 per one and a half hours for War Pension medical examinations at the customer's home.

Information on the cost of the fees paid to doctors in each of the last four years is contained in the table below:

Year	Total costs (£)
1997–98	[1]18,664,242
1996–97	20,593,749
1995–96	16,788,556
1994–95	12,762,000
1993–94	n/a

[1] Up to February 1998.
n/a = Information not available.

I hope that this is helpful.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the sums paid in housing benefit to asylum seekers in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95, *(d)* 1995–96, *(e)* 1996–97 and *(f)* 1997–98. [37971]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Estimate of sums paid in Housing Benefit to Asylum seekers

£ million

Financial year	Estimated housing benefit expenditure
1993–94	160
1994–95	150
1995–96	140
1996–97	120

Sources:
1. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample of claimants also in receipt of Income Support, at the end of May for each year shown.
2. Departmental Report.

Notes:
1. The information requested is not available for May 1992 and is not yet available for May 1997.
2. Expenditure figures are estimates and have been calculated using the Housing Benefit Management System 1 per cent. sample and Departmental Reports. Estimates are based only on cases recorded on the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry as being asylum seekers. They therefore exclude other claimants in receipt of Urgent Case Payments who may in fact be asylum seekers, but are not identified as such. They also exclude any asylum seekers, in receipt of Housing Benefit who are not in receipt of Income Support, although the number of these cases is thought to be very small.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest five million pounds.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 April 1998

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Electronic Voting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Council what estimate she has made of the cost of electronic voting in the House. [38471]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The cost of any possible electronic voting system would depend on what form of electronic voting, if any, was chosen. The Modernisation Committee will shortly be writing to all Members inviting their views on a range of options, which include retaining the current voting system. Cost will be one of the factors taken into account when reviewing these options.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings have been requested with his Department's Ministers by *(a)* Labour and *(b)* Conservative hon. Members; and how many meetings have been granted in each category. [31289]

Mr. Robin Cook: Records of the number of requests for meetings with Ministers are not kept. My Ministerial colleagues and I have met approximately 114 Labour Members and 15 Conservative Members since 1 May 1997. This does not include meetings with or addresses to Parliamentary bodies such as All Party Groups.

We are happy to consider requests for meetings from hon. Members of all parties and as a general rule these have been granted.

Fishing Vessels (Searches)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which dates during March United Kingdom fishing vessels were stopped in British waters and searched by Irish patrol boats; and what representations he has made to the Irish Government about this matter. [37558]

Mr. Robin Cook: UK fishing vessels were stopped by the Irish naval vessel, the LE Emer on 18 March in UK fisheries limits. We have raised the matter with the Irish authorities who regret that boarding took place inside UK fisheries limits.

Kenya

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has had with the Kenyan Government over abuses of the human rights of students. [38585]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We maintain a vigorous dialogue with Kenya on human rights issues, including the treatment of students, through our High Commission in Nairobi and at Ministerial level.

We pressed last year for the repeal of the Public Order Act, the principal legal instrument that had been used to break up meetings organised by Opposition politicians and students. We welcomed its repeal in November, and look to the Kenyan authorities to ensure that non-violent student activities and protests are not obstructed. Our High Commission raised specific cases in which students' human rights had been violated with the Kenyan Attorney General in February.

Business Ambassadors

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *771*, concerning ambassadors for British business, if he will list the duties of each of the ambassadors. [38895]

Mr. Fatchett: The Ambassadors for British Business have volunteered to give some of their time when overseas to promote the UK's wider commercial interests; for example by giving keynote speeches, calling on Ministers or talking informally to prominent local business people. Their exact activities will depend on what they and the diplomatic post concerned agree would be most effective at furthering the UK's commercial interests in a market.

British Ambassadors

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries where the British Ambassador or High Commissioner is female; and how many ambassadors and High Commissioners are male. [38894]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Britain is represented by a female Ambassador or High Commissioner in the following countries: Belarus, Chile, Irish Republic, the Netherlands, Rwanda, South Africa and Uzbekistan.

One hundred and twenty eight Ambassadors or High Commissioners are male. A further ten Permanent Representatives hold the personal rank of Ambassador. They are all male.

Camilla Carr and Jon James

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding the situation of the hostages Camilla Carr and Jon James in Chechnya. [38617]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Chechen authorities have said that Camilla Carr and Jon James are alive, but we do not know where or in what conditions they are being held. We are working hard, with the Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development, to ensure that the Russian and Chechen authorities give top priority to securing their safe release. Any news we have is shared with Camilla's and Jon's families, who are withstanding their ordeal with great courage and dignity. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is looking forward to meeting the families on 23 April.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has had from the Spanish authorities to his representations over the incident of dangerous flying by a Spanish coastguard helicopter in Gibraltar waters on 13 March. [38983]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The immediate response of the Spanish authorities was to reject our protest. They have since agreed to examine our video and photographic evidence of the incident.

South Africa

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of talks between the EU and South Africa during the United Kingdom presidency. [38652]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are committed to a swift and favourable outcome to the negotiations between the EU and South Africa for a Trade and Cooperation Agreement. We hope a conclusion will be possible during our Presidency. The General Affairs Council on 30 March was a useful step forward in preparing the next round of negotiations later this month.

GCHQ

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with GCHQ regarding its proposed re-siting; and if he will make a statement. [38768]

Mr. Robin Cook: I approved the initiation of GCHQ's PFI project in May last year, and fully support the aim to consolidate their operations onto one site. The project is at an advanced stage and four tenders for a single-site solution are currently being evaluated. I will consider GCHQ's recommendations for the final stages of the project next month. An announcement on the future location of GCHQ is expected during the second half of the year.

UN Member States

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the member states of the United Nations with which the United Kingdom does not have diplomatic relations. [39172]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom does not have diplomatic relations with four of the 185 Member States of the United Nations. These are: Bhutan, Iraq, Libya and North Korea.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governments of India and Pakistan concerning their ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. [38735]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I discussed this subject with the Indian High Commissioner on 2 April. The UK has made its position clear to the Indian and Pakistani governments in the past and will continue to do so in the future. We continue to urge India and Pakistan to sign both treaties and to support other measures to promote non-proliferation. Our aim is to promote global non-proliferation and efforts to improve security in the region.

Nuclear Smuggling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to combat nuclear smuggling. [38791]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We believe strongly in the need for an effective and proportionate range of national and international mechanisms to prevent the theft of nuclear material and, on the rare occasions where this does occur, to ensure that there are effective mechanisms to combat nuclear smuggling.

This Department has focused on implementing the G8 Programme for Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Nuclear Material, agreed in 1996. We continue to encourage expanded participation in this programme. Most recently, the UK led a successful exercise to test a Points of Contact system which provides for the immediate exchange of information on those few cases where nuclear material of proliferation concern is smuggled.

The UK also works extremely closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which for some years has had a programme for collecting and sharing information on confirmed trafficking incidents. In the face of increasingly effective action by governments, the number of incidents has declined significantly over the last couple of years. None has been recorded in the UK.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the average marginal tax rate for those families who qualify for the working families tax credit. [38220]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 April 1998]:* About 65% of families who qualify for the Working Families Tax Credit will face a marginal deduction rate of between 66.7% and 69.9% (depending upon the exact rate at which they pay tax and NICs), with marginal rates cut for about 540,000 families, most by over 10 percentage points.

Child Care Tax Credit

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a description of the way childcare for tax credits will operate, including the operation of the fast path to help new employees with childcare costs before their first payment of wage or salary is received; and if he will ensure all benefits agencies and jobcentres are made aware of this provision. [38235]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* The childcare tax credit is an integral part of the "Working Families Tax Credit". An important priority for the WFTC will be to ensure that it gets to recipients efficiently and quickly. The design of the WFTC—whether paid through employers or direct from the Inland Revenue—will aim to deliver the tax credit to individuals reliably and on time. Work is continuing on the administrative arrangements and the Inland Revenue is consulting representatives of employer and other appropriate organisations on the details of how the WFTC will be paid through the wage packet. We aim to make the new literature for WFTC claimants widely available, and to enable both Benefits Agency and Employment Service staff to help clients with the WFTC.

Open-ended Investment Companies

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the timetable for the introduction of legislation to enable cash and fund-of-fund open-ended investment companies to be launched in the United Kingdom domestic market; and if authorisation of cash and fund-of-fund open-ended investment companies will be achieved in time for prospective ISA providers to promote such companies as an alternative to authorised unit trust schemes. [38854]

Mrs. Liddell: I have announced my agreement in principle to the establishment of fund of fund and cash fund oeics and am currently considering the most appropriate way of introducing them. Whether they will be introduced in time for the launch of ISAs in the spring of 1999 depends on which method for introducing them is adopted.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the proposed Budget changes in capital gains tax have been introduced as simplifications of the current system. [36790]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The Budget changes in capital gains tax will lead to eventual simplification of the current system by:

progressively eliminating indexation and substituting the taper which is easier to understand;

phasing out retirement relief;

merging CGT reinvestment relief and the Enterprise Investment Scheme;

introducing a single rate for trusts and the estates of deceased persons.

National Lottery

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes will be made in the treatment of National Lottery expenditures in the definition of general Government expenditure and in the national accounts following the implementation of the National Lottery Bill [*Lords*]. [38559]

Mr. Darling: None.

Tobacco

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been collected in fines from people who have been caught illegally reselling cheap duty paid tobacco bought in Belgium in each year since 1979. [38306]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that central figures are not kept in this form.

Energy Products

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in discussions with the European Commission on harmonising taxation of energy products; and if the Government will continue to maintain a duty exemption on fuel for navigation in private pleasure craft. [38111]

Dawn Primarolo: A meeting of the technical working group which is examining the draft Energy Products Directive is expected towards the end of April. The Government have made it clear in negotiations that one condition of our eventual acceptance of the Directive is that the future of existing derogations be unambiguously settled.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the changes to acceptance in lieu of tax announced on 17 March alter the accounting treatment of such transactions. [36771]

Dawn Primarolo: Under the proposed change, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will no longer reimburse the Inland Revenue for the amount of tax satisfied by the acceptance of heritage assets, and the Inland Revenue's accounting procedures will be altered accordingly. The change will simplify the operation of the scheme within the Government.

Income Tax

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for the current tax year the income tax and national insurance paid and child benefits received by *(a)* a single person without dependants, *(b)* a lone parent with one child aged four years, *(c)* a lone parent with two children aged four and six years, *(d)* a single earner married couple with one child aged four years and *(e)* a single earner married couple with two children aged four and six years, where the gross income is (i) £150, (ii) £200, (iii) £250, (iv) £300 and (v) £400 per week and is wholly from employment; and if in each case he will show the equivalised income before housing costs on the assumption that there are no child care costs, housing costs are £75 per week and all available benefits are claimed, and showing also the tax and national insurance contributions net of benefits as a percentage of the equivalised incomes. [32428]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is contained in the tables.

	Gross earnings (£)				
	150	*200*	*250*	*300*	*350*
Single Person					
National Insurance	10.04	15.04	20.04	25.04	35.04
Income Tax	14.44	25.74	37.24	48.74	71.74
Child Benefit	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Family Credit	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	16.3	20.4	22.9	24.6	26.7
Net Income	125.52	159.22	192.72	226.22	293.22
Equivalised Net Income	205.77	261.01	315.93	370.85	480.68
Lone Parent (1 child aged 4 years)					
National Insurance	10.04	15.04	20.04	25.04	35.04
Income Tax	9.16	20.46	31.96	43.46	66.46
Child Benefit	17.10	17.10	17.10	17.10	17.10
Family Credit	32.70	9.11	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−20.4	4.6	14.0	17.1	21.1
Net Income	180.59	190.70	215.10	248.60	315.60
Equivalised Net Income	228.60	241.40	272.27	314.68	399.49
Lone Parent (2 children aged 4 years and 6 years)					
National Insurance	10.04	15.04	20.04	25.04	35.04
Income Tax	9.16	20.46	31.96	43.46	66.46
Child Benefit	26.10	26.10	26.10	26.10	26.10
Family Credit	44.75	21.16	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−34.4	−5.9	10.4	14.1	18.9
Net Income	201.64	211.75	224.10	257.60	324.60
Equivalised Net Income	201.64	211.75	224.10	257.60	324.60
Single Earner Married Couple (1 child aged 4 years)					
National Insurance	10.04	15.04	20.04	25.04	35.04
Income Tax	9.16	20.46	31.96	43.46	66.46
Child Benefit	11.05	11.05	11.05	11.05	11.05
Family Credit	32.70	9.11	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−16.4	7.7	16.4	19.2	22.6
Net Income	174.54	184.65	209.05	242.55	309.55
Equivalised Net Income	147.92	156.49	177.16	205.55	262.33
Single Earner Married Couple (2 children aged 4 and 6)					
National Insurance	10.04	15.04	20.04	25.04	35.04
Income Tax	9.16	20.46	31.96	43.46	66.46
Child Benefit	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05
Family Credit	44.75	21.16	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−30.4	−2.9	12.8	16.2	20.4
Net Income	195.59	205.70	218.05	251.55	318.55
Equivalised Net Income	140.72	147.99	156.87	180.97	229.17

The figures in the table are weekly amounts for the 1997–98 tax year. They assume that the earner in the household is working over 30 hours a week for family credit purposes.

The standard McClements scales have been used to determine equivalised income. This is the same process that is used in the DSS's Households Below Average Income publication.

Income tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, are shown as a percentage of gross earnings, with negative figures where the family is a net gainer overall from direct taxes and benefits.

Some of these families may also be entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit. However, as this will depend upon the composition of the housing costs (between mortgage payments, council tax, and rent) housing benefit and council tax benefit has been left out of these figures.

Cash Ratio Deposits

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about cash ratio deposits. [39315]

Mr. Darling: The Government's Response to Consultation on Cash Ratio Deposits (CRDs) is published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Government's decision that the initial CRD ratios should be zero on Eligible Liabilities up to £400m and 0.15 per cent. on Eligible Liabilities over £400m reflects the responses to consultation, taking into account the desire for administrative simplicity and clarity. I believe this is a fair outcome.

Earnings

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many employees currently earn more than £450 per week. [39193]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 20 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on weekly earnings.

The latest available information, from the New Earnings Survey 1997, is contained in the table below:

Percentage of employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay-period was unaffected by absence, gross weekly earnings, Great Britain, April 1997

	greater than £450
Full-time	23.3
Part-time	1.1
All	18.3

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of Great Britain-based workers earned less than *(a)* £2, *(b)* £2.50, *(c)* £3, *(d)* £3.50 and *(e)* £4 per hour in April *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [38293]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dennis Roberts to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 20 April 1998:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on hourly earnings.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Percentage of employees[1] hourly earnings in their main job, Great Britain, not seasonally adjusted

	less than £2.00	*less than £2.50*	*less than £3.00*	*less than £3.50*	*less than £4.00*
Spring 1996[2]	2.2	4.1	7.9	15.5	23.3
Spring 1997[2]	1.8	4.0	7.1	13.6	20.8

[1] Excluding those whose workplace was outside the United Kingdom

[2] March to May

Source:

ONS, Labour Force Survey

Work is being undertaken to assess the quality of earnings data from the LFS and the New Earnings Survey (NES). Current indications are that the LFS provides the more reliable estimates of workers on low pay, but nevertheless tends to overestimate the proportion of low paid workers. The figures in the table should therefore be taken as upper estimates of the proportions. Details of this assessment of the quality of earning data are expected to be published in the May issue of Labour Market Trends copies of which will be available from the House of Commons Library.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Gale: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was, for the last five years for which figures are available, the proportion of the total legal aid bill incurred in *(a)* Counsel's fees and *(b)* QCs' fees; what was the proportion of the legal aid bill in each of the last five years spent on white collar fraud trials; and if he will make a statement. [38796]

Mr. Hoon: For criminal higher legal aid, the proportion paid to counsel and to QCs in each year was as follows:

percentage

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
All counsel	54	55	55	53	55
QCs	21	24	27	26	26

For civil legal aid, criminal magistrates' legal aid, and advice and assistance, the proportion paid to counsel was as follows:

percentage

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
All counsel	11	11	11	10	15

It is not possible to identify separately payments made to QCs as the rank of counsel is not recorded on the Legal Aid Board's computer systems.

Nor is it possible to identify separately expenditure on white collar fraud. Fraud related offences are recorded under the general headings of "fraud", "false accounting" and "other forgery". In each of those categories, in completed Crown Court cases, the proportion of criminal higher expenditure was as follows:

percentage

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Fraud	10.8	10.3	15.1	14.4	10.5
False accounting	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5
Other forgery	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.6	0.6

Learning Disabilities (Training)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the need for *(a)* barristers, *(b)* judges and *(c)* magistrates to receive training to increase their awareness of the needs of people with learning disabilities, when they appear in courts. [37597]

Mr. Hoon: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is a non-departmental governmental body. The JSB has held a number of sessions in both induction and continuation training on equal treatment, including dealing with people with learning difficulties. The JSB has an advisory committee whose remit has recently been extended to cover all aspects of equal treatment training, including training on increasing awareness of the needs of people with learning

disabilities. The Committee will be considering guidance for members of the judiciary on handling those with learning difficulties.

Lay Magistrate training is delivered by Magistrates' Courts' Committees but the JSB has a role in setting the syllabus. Lay Magistrates already address the issue of equal treatment of all in the light of their judicial oath but the JSB has recently completed a project identifying the skills and knowledge required by Lay Magistrates to ensure equality of treatment for all who appear in their courts.

Training of barristers is a matter for the General Council of the Bar.

Judicial Appointments Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 679, if he will list the groups and individuals his officials consulted informally about the possible appointment of a judicial appointments commission. [38226]

Mr. Hoon: The groups and individuals informally consulted by officials on the possible establishment of a judicial appointments commission included the following:

The Lord Chief Justice
The Master of the Rolls
The President of the Family Division
The Vice-Chancellor
The Senior Law Lord (Lord Goff of Chieveley)
The Senior Presiding Judge
The Council of Her Majesty's Circuit Judges
The Association of District Judges
The Registrar of Criminal Appeals
The Director of Studies, Judicial Studies Board
The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate
The Chairman of the Association of Stipendiary Magistrates for England and Wales
The Right Hon. the Lord Kingsdown (Association of Lords Lieutenant)
The Chairman of the Magistrates' Association
The Duchy of Lancaster Office
The President and senior officials of The Law Society
The Chairman and the Chief Executive of the General Council of the Bar
The Prime Minister's Appointments Secretary
Kate Malleson, University of Westminster
Dr. Cheryl Thomas, Wolfson College, University of Oxford
Professor Rodney Brazier, University of Manchester
Senior officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department
The Magistrates and Tribunals Training Adviser, Judicial Studies Board
The Commission for Racial Equality
The Equal Opportunities Commission
Recruitment and Assessment Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what factors he took into account in deciding to consult informally rather than formally on the possible creation of a judicial appointments commission. [38208]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor decided that officials should conduct informal consultations with a view to identifying the issues of principle and practicality that would need to be addressed in any formal consultations on the possible creation of a Judicial Appointments Commission. Following this consultation, the Lord Chancellor announced in October that he had decided not to proceed with further work, including any formal consultation process, on the possible creation of a Commission in view of the other substantial priorities facing his Department and his decision to concentrate on making changes in the existing judicial appointments process to improve its openness, flexibility and effectiveness.

Welsh Language Schemes

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Court Service and the Legal Aid Board have to implement Welsh language schemes. [38080]

Mr. Hoon: The Court Service and Legal Aid Board must comply with the Welsh Language Act 1993. The Court Service has prepared a draft scheme, which is acceptable to the Welsh Language Board. However, the Board before approving the scheme had indicated it will wait until Rules of Court are settled for hearing arrangements. As yet, no date has been given for the Rules to be settled. However, the Court Service has, since April 1997, provided most of the services referred to in the draft scheme. An information sheet is available in all court offices in Wales which explains the scheme.

The Legal Aid Board is also working with the Welsh Language Board on a Welsh Language Scheme which will set out how the Board will comply with the Act. The Legal Aid board has been asked to prepare a scheme and submit it to the Welsh Language Board by 26 February 1999.

PRIME MINISTER

Trade Union Recognition

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from *(a)* trade union leaders and *(b)* business leaders in respect of the Fairness at Work White Paper. [37959]

The Prime Minister: I have met TUC and CBI representatives on several occasions to discuss trade union recognition and related issues.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings he has had with other heads of Government to discuss the issues of millennium compliance. [37961]

The Prime Minister: I have recently chaired two major international conferences at which the Millennium Bug issue was highlighted. Leaders at both the European Conference on 12 March and the ASEM 2 Conference on 3–4 April agreed the importance of international co-operation to ensure millennium compliance.

Ministerial Accommodation

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *376*, what valuation figures relating to the accommodation and furnishings provided to Ministers are prepared for tax purposes. [38212]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* The situation remains the same as under the previous administration. It is accepted by the Inland Revenue that Government Ministers occupying official residences by reason of their office meet the statutory conditions (mainly in Section 145(4) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988) for exemption from a tax charge on provided living accommodation. So no valuation figures are required by the Inland Revenue in relation to provision of such residences. There will be a charge where furnishings or other services are provided and figures will be prepared for inclusion in Ministers' tax returns.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Banking Supervisory Authorities

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department provided support to banking supervisory and regulatory authorities in 1997–98; and what plans she has for such support in 1998–99. [39185]

Clare Short: In 1997–98 the Department for International Development provided support to banking supervisory and regulatory authorities in the following countries:

India
Russia
Ukraine
Moldova
Slovak Republic
Czech Republic
Bosnia

We have also provided some support to the Bank of England's Centre for Central Banking Studies.

For Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS regions, in 1998–99 we will continue to support the Central Bank of Russia and other authorities where we have a useful contribution to make. Support to the Reserve Bank of India will continue and, in view of the recent events in South East and East Asia, we intend to make available support to banking authorities in this region. We are also currently exploring, in collaboration with other organisations, the role we can play in building sound regulatory structures for microfinance institutions.

Micro-finance Institutions

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development with which central banks her Department has held discussions concerning the introduction of legislation for the regulation and supervision of micro-finance institutions. [39182]

Clare Short: The growth in numbers and in size of microfinance institutions (MFIs) has been significant only in the last couple of years. Most MFIs have received their capital as grants from donors which means that supervision and regulation was not an immediate issue. Only recently have a relatively small number of MFIs become sufficiently mature to be seeking to raise more capital from depositors. It is at this stage that supervision and regulation become particularly important as individuals' savings are at stake. To date the performance of central banks in regulating and supervising formal financial institutions has been weak due to problems of political corruption.

The Department for International Development are at the forefront of the donor winning, by supporting the work being done by the Microfinance Network and by CGAP in this important area. Bilaterally, we are at the most advanced stage in Bangladesh, where DFID are supporting a supervision and regulation project, which includes dialogue with the central bank. As more MFIs mature, we anticipate providing further support to this area.

Development Programme Support

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries in 1997–98 governance problems interrupted her Department's programme support. [39186]

Clare Short: During 1997–1998 development programme support was interrupted in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia.

All aid was suspended to Sierra Leone when the democratically elected government were overthrown in a military coup on 25 May 1997. During the coup period we supported the government in exile to prepare for their return to Freetown; selected refugee programmes for Sierra Leoneans in neighbouring countries; and the humanitarian work of the international committee of the Red Cross in Sierra Leone. Following the return of the democratic government to Freetown, we provided immediate technical and logistical support to assist the re-establishment of the functions of government and further humanitarian assistance.

Following our expression of concern over a policing incident, the Ethiopian government requested that the UK should undertake no new development projects in July 1997. Following constructive discussions between the governments, aid talks with the Ethiopian government were held in March 1998 and it was agreed to consider new development projects.

Poverty Assessments

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department conducted participatory poverty assessments in 1997–98; and in which it plans to in 1998–99. [39187]

Clare Short: We supported a participatory poverty assessment in 1997–98 in Kenya, and commenced work on a participatory poverty assessment in Egypt. In 1998–99 we are committed to supporting national level participatory poverty assessments in Pakistan and Uganda, and to carrying out one for urban poverty in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. Work on the participatory poverty assessment in Egypt is continuing. Work on the Poverty and Inequality Report in South Africa (for which

the participatory poverty assessment which we supported has been a major component) has been ongoing throughout this period.

Drug Smuggling (Caribbean)

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which Caribbean countries her Department is currently providing assistance to combat drug smuggling; and at what estimated cost. [39177]

Clare Short: We are providing assistance to all Caribbean countries, including the Overseas Territories, as part of the Caribbean Drugs Initiative (CDI). This is an EU/UNDCP co-ordinated initiative aimed at combating the drugs trade which involves widely based support for Governments in the region. The Initiative aims to include improved planning at national level, law enforcement, demand reduction, treatment and rehabilitation. This programme is the most ambitious and comprehensive attempt so far to tackle the drugs problem in the region.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State announced at the Caribbean Forum in February that we have earmarked £7.5 million as DFID's contribution to the Caribbean Drugs Initiative (CDI). This will be used to help build capacity at the local level in police and customs in some of the more vulnerable Eastern Caribbean countries.

International Development Act

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has held on proposals for a new international development act; and if she will make a statement. [39188]

Clare Short: During preparation of the White Paper on International Development we received a number of representations supporting a new development act.

As we said in the White Paper and my Departmental Report, the Government are committed to consulting further on the desirability of a new act.

South Africa

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the estimated cost of her Department's support for the pilot land reform programme in the Republic of South Africa. [39179]

Clare Short: We have been assisting the Republic of South Africa with its land reform programme since 1995. Our support aims to help them to devise and test efficient, equitable and replicable means of transferring land to the rural poor. The expenditure for this pilot programme amounted to around £2 million to March 1998, and we expect to spend in total over £5 million over the next two years. The EU has also committed over £6 million to the programme, to which Britain's contribution is approximately 15 per cent.

Civil Service Reform Projects

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department is currently funding civil service reform projects; and at what estimated cost. [39178]

Clare Short: Commitments of development support for civil service reform since 1995–96 have been as follows:

£000

Country	Commitment
Anguilla	190
Baltic States	716
Bulgaria	750
Colombia	400
Czech Republic	185
Ethopia	120
Ghana	5,000
Grenada	240
Hungary	534
Indonesia	670
Jamaica	2,000
Kenya	628
Lesotho	660
Malawi	474
Mexico	110
Montserrat	70
Namibia	701
Poland	967
Sierra Leone	1,200
Slovak Republic	539
South Africa	4,840
Tanzania	3,125
Uganda	802
Ukraine	165
West Bank/Gaza	770
Zambia	160
Zimbabwe	235

Determining the precise current status of these activities would involve consultation with DFID offices worldwide and involve disproportionate expense.

Central and Eastern Europe

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will publish the results of her Department's survey of the extent of poverty in Central and Eastern Europe. [39183]

Clare Short: A literature review has been carried out for my Department by the University of Warwick. There are no plans at present to publish it, but it is available from Dr. Simon Clarke at the University.

Zimbabwe

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department's officials have held with the Government of Zimbabwe about land reform; and if she will make a statement. [39165]

Clare Short: Officials held discussions with the Zimbabwean delegation to the recent conference on land reform in Zimbabwe at the University of London, and keep in contact with the Government and other stakeholders in Zimbabwe. I also met with the Finance Minister in the margins of the World Bank Spring meeting.

Financial Reform Projects

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her

Department proposes to promote replication of the Shanghai Municipal Financial Reform Project in 1998–99. [39184]

Clare Short: We have no current plans to promote replication of the Shanghai Municipal Finance Reform project although we will draw on the positive experience of this project in developing proposals in other countries. Opportunities for replication in China will be discussed with the Chinese Government as part of a project review later this year.

Land Tenure Group

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the members of her Department's Land Tenure Group. [39180]

Clare Short: This Group is an internal Working Group of officials in my Department chaired by the Head of Natural Resources Policy and Advisory Department. An initial comparative study prepared for the Group by the Natural Resources Institute was published last month; a copy is being placed in the Library.

Centre for Humanitarian Aid

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to fund the Centre for Humanitarian Aid's Moscow newspaper, BEZDNA. [38600]

Clare Short: My Department does not provide direct funding for Russian newspapers. We have no plans to support BEZDNA. But we have engaged "The Big Issue in Scotland" to provide technical assistance to a similar street newspaper which benefits the homeless in St. Petersburg called "Na Dye" ("The Depths"). We are considering how the experience gained from this project might be extended to other regions in Russia.

Indonesia (Forest Fires)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help and assistance she is giving to the Government of Indonesia to contain and extinguish forest fires. [38978]

Clare Short: We have provided, through the United Nations, the services of a fire-fighting and logistics expert for a 2 month period. In addition officials from my Department will be participating in a United Nations meeting on 20 and 21 April which will examine the most effective methods to deal with the fires and will also discuss possible joint efforts of the international community to assist—including the European Union and United Nations agencies. For the longer term it is important that the Government of Indonesia tackles the underlying causes of these fires: we are supporting work on appropriate forest policy and regulation through practical field experience.

Refugee Health

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what consultations she has had about the provisions of the forthcoming field manual to be published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Population Fund on the subject of reproductive health in refugee situations; and what response she made. [38637]

Clare Short: Officials have been consulted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on a draft manual on Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations. We have highlighted the importance we attach to appropriate standards of care in the provision of all health services, taking account of the dangers to health faced by individuals who are seeking care.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the United Nations' budget for the health needs of refugees, per refugee, for *(a)* the emergency phase and *(b)* the post-emergency phase of refugee situations in each of the last 10 years; and what are the projected figures for the next three years. [38641]

Clare Short: A full breakdown along the lines requested is not available. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is responsible for most UN expenditure on refugees, has provided the following figures on the amount of its annual budget spent on health for the last five years.

Year	*Total budget US$ millions*	*Health budget US$ millions*	*Health budget as percentage of total*
1994	1,320	106.1	8
1995	1,301.4	96.6	7.4
1996	1,358.2	83.8	6.2
1997	1,214.4	70.3	5.8
1998	1,123.7	51.1	4.5

UNHCR is not able to provide projected figures for the next three years.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the principal causes of mortality in order of prevalence in those refugee camps to which her Department provides assistance. [38642]

Clare Short: Globally the principal causes of mortality in refugee situations, in order of prevalence, are diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection and malaria. The specific prevalence is dependent upon the area in which a given camp is situated.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what meetings officials in her Department *(a)* have had and *(b)* plan to have with NGOs to discuss the use of manual vacuum aspiration for elective abortions in refugee camps. [38639]

Clare Short: My Officials maintain regular dialogue with a large number of non governmental organisations working in the field of reproductive health in refugee situations. These discussions underscore the duty of providers of reproductive health services to ensure that quality health care is provided, making use of technologies that are safe and appropriate to the setting. The subject of manual vacuum aspiration for elective abortions was not raised at a recent discussion with representatives of over twenty agencies active in the reproductive health field; though informal representations

received more recently from personnel working for three non governmental organisations have been received and taken up with the UNHCR.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding from independent sources was received by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in each of the last 10 years; and what assessment she has made of the extent to which such sources are also involved in funding population control activities. [38640]

Clare Short: UNHCR receives voluntary contributions from many sources. The table gives a breakdown of contributions received for 1994–1997.

US$ million

Year	*Governmental*	*Inter-governmental*	*Private*	*Total*
1994	791.8	234.7	29.1	1,055.6
1995	754.2	225.4	16.7	996.3
1996	809.8	147.7	12.4	969.9
1997	679.9	117.9	8.8	806.6

No assessment has been made of the extent to which such sources are involved in reproductive health care. UNHCR seeks to provide comprehensive reproductive health care within primary health care programmes and engages no population control activities.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy to support programmes to protect women in refugee camps from pressures to use inappropriate post-coital and abortion techniques; and if she will make a statement. [38645]

Clare Short: It is my Department's policy to support programmes that offer all women and men essential health care, including reproductive health care, information and services, that responds to their demands and offers them informed choices. My view is that women in refugee camps are entitled to free and informed choice in line with best medical practice.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has recently received about the use of manual vacuum aspiration for performing abortions in refugee camps; whether her Department issues guidance to refugee workers about complications arising from the use of such techniques in refugee camps and other non-sterile environments; and if she will make a statement. [38636]

Clare Short: My Department has received comments from personnel who work with three non governmental organisations on a draft manual on Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations which is being prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They have questioned sections of the manual which relate to procedures for managing incomplete abortions, or miscarriages, experienced by women in refugee situations. We have conveyed these concerns to UNHCR.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines international standards for safety of elective and emergency gynaecological procedures and this guidance is of course available to refugee workers.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the extent of the compliance of the distribution of post coital contraception in refugee camps with the terms of the safety information provided by the manufacturers; and if she will make a statement. [38644]

Clare Short: The World Health Organisation defines standards for the appropriate provision of emergency contraception in all settings. It is our assessment that all women should have access to the information, services and commodities that they need to have children by choice, and be able to use them safely.

EU Aid

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representation she has made to the World Bank, IMF, regional development banks and other OECD aid donors about the increasing share of international aid accounted for by the EU and its member states and the decreasing share accounted for by others; and if she will make a statement. [38378]

Clare Short: We, and other donors have agreed an International Development Strategy which acknowledges that, to make progress towards its goals, the international community needs to sustain and increase the volume of development assistance. We hold discussions with other donors on aid levels, and respective contributions, mainly in the course of replenishment negotiations for Lomé, IDA and the Regional Banks, and in discussions with the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD on reviews of individual donor programmes, most recently that of the United States.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received on the effects of monetary union on *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU official development assistance; and if she will make a statement. [38536]

Clare Short: I have received no such representations.

Children (War Areas)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much financial aid has been donated to international funds for the protection of children in war areas in the last year. [37369]

Clare Short: It is not possible to provide separate details for our support to protection of children from our overall support to international organisations working in war areas. My support for protection work was £37.8 million (preliminary estimate) in financial year 1997/98. This funded a variety of programmes run by the International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nations Children's Fund, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs/Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In addition, we have supported many projects managed by non governmental organisations who are working with vulnerable communities in war areas.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Ships Lost at Sea

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what statutory or other authority a High Court judge can exercise the power to look into the reasons for the loss of a ship at sea. [38446]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In circumstances where the Secretary of State orders a re-hearing of a Formal Investigation which took place in England or Wales, Section 269(2) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 enables him to order that re-hearing to take place in the High Court as an alternative to re-hearing before a Wreck Commissioner.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the powers of a wreck commissioner and assessors when inquiring into the loss of a ship in respect of *(a)* ruling on the scope of an inquiry within its terms of reference, *(b)* deciding whether evidence should be given on oath, who should be called to give evidence and whether the civil or criminal rules of evidence should apply, *(c)* awarding of witness expenses and of costs to or against any party, *(d)* deciding on the relevance and admissibility of evidence, and *(e)* reaching a conclusion on the reasons for the loss and making recommendations arising from it; and under what statutory or other authority they exercise these powers. [38441]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is given.

(a) The questions to be raised at a Formal Investigation are determined by the Attorney-General;

(b) The procedure to be appointed is in general a matter for the discretion of the Wreck Commissioner who may hold a preliminary meeting to give directions as to procedure. Witnesses are called initially on behalf of the Attorney-General and then by the other parties.

(c) Costs of the investigation and of the parties, and the question by whom such costs are to be paid are in the discretion of the Wreck Commissioner.

(d) Relevance and admissibility of evidence are matters for the Commissioner, although affidavits, statutory declarations and other written evidence are admissible unless the Commissioner considers it unjust for such evidence to be admitted.

(e) These are matters for the Wreck Commissioner. The Assessors are required to sign the report with or without reservations or to state in writing their reasons for dissent.

This is a summary of the powers which are exercised under Sections 268–270 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, and the Merchant Shipping (Formal Investigation) Rules 1985 as amended (SI 1985 No. 1001 amended by SI 1990 No. 123) to which reference should be made for more detail of the powers and procedures.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the powers of a High Court judge when inquiring into the loss of a ship; and how they differ from those of a wreck commissioner and assessors in respect of *(a)* ruling on the scope of an inquiry within its terms of reference; *(b)* deciding who should be called to give evidence, whether evidence should be given on oath, and whether civil or criminal rules of evidence should apply, *(c)* awarding of witness expenses and costs to or against any party, *(d)* deciding on the relevance and admissibility of evidence and *(e)* reaching a conclusion on the reasons for the loss and making recommendation arising from it. [38440]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Where a re-hearing has been Ordered to take place in the High Court the matter is assigned to the Queen's Bench Division, Admiralty Court and the Judge exercises wide powers of that Court set out in Orders 55, 57 and 77 of the Rules of the Supreme Court as to the issues identified by my hon. Friend. The powers of a Wreck Commissioner are the subject of my answer today to a separate question from my hon. Friend.

Waste Disposal

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in which local authorities in the North West Region landraising was assessed to be the best practical environmental option for waste disposal in each of the last three years. [38468]

Angela Eagle: No one form of waste treatment can be identified as the best practicable environmental option for all waste streams in any given area. Properly engineered and licensed landraising remains one option. Policy Planning Guidance note No. 10 on waste disposal and management, which will detail the relevant considerations that local authorities must take into account when addressing this issue, is due to be published later this year. Meanwhile, the draft waste local plans of the authorities in the north west region, which are currently under discussion, include their intended use of landfill/landraising.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which local authorities in the North West have published maps for areas of search for new landfill/landraising sites for non-inert wastes in each of the last three years; and which he expects to publish such plans in 1998–99. [38465]

Angela Eagle: Although the Government Office for the North West maintains copies of draft waste local plans, unitary development plans etc. for local authorities in the North West region, it would involve disproportionate expense to collate the information in the form requested. This can be obtained directly from the local authorities concerned.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what evidence he has evaluated of leakage of toxic materials from waste dumped in porous limestone quarries; [38873]

(2) what investigations his Department has carried out on the effects of waste-tipping in limestone quarries. [38875]

Angela Eagle: The disposal of waste in landfills is controlled under the waste management licensing system in force under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The objective of the licensing system is to ensure that waste is disposed of in a manner which protects the environment and human health. The Environment Agency are responsible for the consideration of applications for licences to dispose of waste in landfills and the supervision of licences which are issued.

My Department published in 1993 the results of research that it commissioned from WRC (formerly the Water Research Centre) on the pollution characteristics of landfills in quarries in magnesian limestone areas. The research report was entitled "Monitoring for leachate migration from landfills in Magnesian Limestone quarries at old Wingate and Joint Stocks, Durham: 1984–1992". I have sent a copy of the report to my hon. Friend and arranged for copies to be deposited in the Library of the House.

In 1995 the Department's evaluation of this and other research was incorporated into the recommendations of Waste Management Paper 26B, "Landfill Design, Construction and Operational Practice". This paper indicates that former quarries may be used for the landfilling of waste provided that the design incorporates adequate arrangements to contain and monitor leakage.

Rail Accident, Glynde

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the conclusions of the investigation into the recent railway accident at Glynde station; and what action has been taken subsequently. [38714]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The conclusions of the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate investigation into the accident at Glynde Railway Station, East Sussex on 20 April 1997 were that serious breaches of health and safety legislation had taken place, resulting in the prosecution of Amec Rail Ltd.

On 4 November 1997, Amec Rail Ltd. pleaded guilty to two charges: failing to ensure the health and safety of their employees and failing to ensure the safety of persons not in their employment. Amec Rail were fined £15,000 on each charge and ordered to pay costs of £2,007.

Millennium Experience

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the roadworks whose completion will benefit road access to the Millennium Dome, giving the expected completion date in each case. [38718]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Millennium Experience will be a car-free event, but it is essential to secure good access for the traffic that has yet to get to the Dome such as coaches, taxis, disabled drivers and delivery vehicles. The following road improvements are taking place.

A12 Hackney to M11 Link Road

The road is planned to be opened in Autumn 1999.

A102(M) Access Improvements

Works are due to commence in July 1998 for completion in June 1999.

Blackwall Tunnel

Work to refurbish the ventilation system for the southbound Blackwall tunnel is due for the completion in summer 1999. An exit ramp to divert overheight lorries from the northbound entrance to the tunnel was completed in October 1997.

Primary Route Network Re-signing

Scheme replace the green backed Primary network signing in London. Tenders for the East London sector affecting routes to Greenwich have been invited with completion programmed for Autumn 1999.

Woolwich Road Improvement Scheme

The London Borough of Greenwich are receiving funding to upgrade to dual carriageway, the remaining single carriageway section of the Woolwich Road (A206) Completion is planned for May 1999.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans for improvements to the transport infrastructure in preparation for the opening of the Millennium Experience. [37437]

Ms Glenda Jackson: By the Millennium, there will be a variety of attractive and convenient means of travel available for visitors to the Dome which involve new and improved transport infrastructure as part of an integrated approach to provide access to the Millennium Experience. The following improvements are planned:

The construction of the Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) with a major new station by the gates of the Dome.

A new bus station next to the JLE station with bus routes from several directions.

A new pier for river services to central London (and historic Greenwich).

A dedicated bus service linking the North Kent rail line at Charlton Station to the Dome.

Completion of the A12 Hackney to M11 Link road.

Replacement of green-backed Primary Route Network signs on east London routes to Greenwich.

A refurbished ventilation system for the southbound Blackwall tunnel. An exit ramp to divert overheight lorries from the northbound entrance to the tunnel was completed in October 1997.

New road links from the A102(M) onto local roads on the Greenwich Peninsula to provide access for those who need to come by road (such as coach parties and disabled drivers).

A new riverside cycle/walk way linking Greenwich Town Centre to the Dome, plus facilities for visitors to leave their bicycles and motorbikes securely

A new cable car system is planned by a private company to cross the Thames.

A purpose built coach park at the Dome site with driver and passenger facilities.

Former Coalfields

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what priority the Planning Inspectorate gives to planning applications on brownfield sites in former coalmining communities. [38654]

Mr. Raynsford: The determination of planning applications is the responsibility in the first instance of local planning authorities. In the case of planning applications that have been called in for determination by my right hon. Friend, no one form of development proposal is given priority over another.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when the Coalfields Task Force will report on its programme of action; [38656]

(2) what priority his Department gives to employment creation measures in former coalfield communities. [38655]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister established the Coalfields Task Force last October to consider what more might be done to assist communities affected by pit closures. Their report will be published in May. In response to their recommendations on employment creation and other issues, the Deputy Prime Minister will launch a programme of action for the coalfields at a National Coalfields Conference to be held on Wednesday 24 June at Ollerton Miners' Welfare in North Nottinghamshire.

European Regional Statistics

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what meetings he has had with representatives of the European Commission to discuss the adoption of the English regions for the purposes of producing European regional statistics; and if he will make a statement. [39259]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the letter from the Director of the Office for National Statistics to my noble Friend Lord Bruce of Donington, published on 2 February 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column *82*, following his Question to my noble Friend Lord McIntosh, which reports progress on the adoption by the European Union of the Government Offices for the Regions for the classification of statistics for English regions.

Planning Policy Guidance

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to develop economic instruments to support planning policy guidance. [39000]

Mr. Raynsford: As was set out in a policy statement in February, we are seeking to open up the debate about the scope for using economic instruments to help achieve our planning objectives. The scope for detailed proposals has not yet been determined, and final decisions on taxation are, of course, a matter for the Chancellor.

Connex South Central

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *2*, if he will make a statement on the issues raised in the 306 letters received by his Department about rail services provided by Connex South Central. [39297]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A wide range of issues has been raised in correspondence, including performance, fares, service patterns and quality, capacity, investment and proposals to extend the franchise. The Franchising Director is responsible for overseeing Connex South Central's performance and managing their franchise contract.

Canals

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the re-opening of canals with the potential for recreational use; what sources of public funding are available for such projects; and if he will make a statement. [38794]

Angela Eagle: The Government recognise the economic, environmental and amenity benefits that inland waterways can bring and are keen to maximise the full potential of the canal network. Our policy on upgrading British Waterways' canals is that this should not add to their existing liabilities: this usually involves third party funding for the extra costs of maintaining a navigable canal.

Volunteers and the many canal restoration societies play a valuable part in restoring canals. We have provided financial help to a range of canal restoration projects through the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund, Land Reclamation Programme grant and the Environmental Action Fund. Projects are also eligible for funding from the various Lottery distribution boards, from local authorities and from Europe. We look forward to receiving the report from the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council on their prioritisation of restoration projects which should ensure that available funding is more effectively targeted.

Unified Business Rate

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will allow new businesses to pay 25 per cent. of the unified business rates in their first years, 50 per cent. in the second and 75 per cent. in the third year; [39033]

(2) if he will reduce the unified business rate where the owner or proprietor lives on the premises in lieu of council tax. [39031]

Mr. Raynsford: On 30 March we published our consultation paper "Modernising local government: Business Rates", setting out our proposals on the future of non-domestic rates. We indicated there our willingness to consider reducing the rate bills of small businesses, and invited views by 1 June on the approach to be adopted.

Bye-laws

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures his Department follows when considering an application to introduce a bye-law from *(a)* a district, *(b)* a borough, *(c)* a town and *(d)* a parish council; and what mechanisms his Department has for verifying the application. [38734]

Mr. Raynsford: In all cases, my Department ensures that an application meets the stringent tests as to the validity of byelaws which have been laid down by the courts, namely, that a byelaw should be within the power of the enabling legislation, that it is not repugnant to the general law, nor uncertain nor unreasonable.

In verifying an application, my Department ensures that it is accompanied by a copy of the council's resolution; the sealed byelaws; the draft byelaws previously approved by the Department; a copy of the newspaper(s) containing the notice; the proper officer's certificate as to deposit of a copy of the byelaws; copies of objections, if any, received by the council and confirmation of compliance with additional requirements of Local Acts (if any).

Parking Restrictions (Schools)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to make parking restrictions outside school entrances mandatory, allowing local authorities powers of variation. [39198]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Local traffic authorities already have responsibility and the appropriate powers for deciding where, whether and when parking outside school entrances should be prohibited, and whether "Keep clear" markings should be advisory or mandatory. We have no plans to change this.

Public Transport (Disabled Access)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to provide funding for making buses accessible for people with disabilities. [38760]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Bus manufacturers and operators are already recognising the commercial benefits of accessibility not only for disabled people but also for those passengers travelling with prams or baby buggies.

Government do provide funding to local authorities through the Local Transport Settlement in order to improve the physical environment, such as pavements and bus stops to provide better access to existing buses.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to set a deadline for all buses to be accessible for people with disabilities. [38761]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are currently consulting with disability organisations, industry and local authorities on our proposed timetable for implementation of the bus and coach provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

We have suggested that new large single deck buses should be accessible from 1 January 2000 and all large single deck buses by 2015, all new double deck buses from 1 January 2002 with an end date of 2017 for all double deck buses to be accessible. For coaches and small buses we are proposing 1 January 2005 for new vehicles and 2020 for total compliance of all vehicles.

We will be consulting on our final proposals in the form of draft regulations when we have considered the responses to the current consultation exercise.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on encouraging implementation of the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 with reference to public transport for people with disabilities. [38763]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are committed to comprehensive civil rights for disabled people. Accessible public transport, within the framework of an integrated transport policy, is fundamentally important to delivering this commitment.

We have drawn up detailed proposals on the transport provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act covering bus and coach, rail and licensed taxis. We are consulting with disability organisations, industry and local authorities both on the technical details and on the timetable for implementation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans there are to adapt London Underground stations to provide access for people with disabilities. [38762]

Ms Glenda Jackson: All new stations on the Jubilee Line Extension will be fully accessible to people with disabilities. London Transport also has plans for developing a step-free network of around 60 key stations. The Government have asked LT to look at how these plans can be accelerated by the extra funding which the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 20 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1539–42*.

Eurostar

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he will verify the accuracy of the Eurostar traffic forecasts submitted to him by those organisations bidding to *(a)* construct the Channel Tunnel rail link and *(b)* run the Eurostar franchise. [39002]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Any forecasts produced by these parties are done for their own purposes and are not for endorsement by the Government. The Government have however commissioned an independent view based on information provided by the parties.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the timetable for the establishment of a Eurostar service from Birmingham to the Continent; and if he will make a statement. [38619]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The provision of these services is the responsibility of Eurostar (UK) Limited which is a subsidiary of London & Continental Railways Limited (LCR). LCR have assured me that Eurostar (UK) Limited are continuing to work with Railtrack in search of a solution to the continuing technical difficulties of operating Regional Eurostar rolling stock on parts of the existing network. These difficulties have prevented the issue of the safety clearances that are required before passenger services can be operated. LCR say that progress is being made, but regret that it is likely to be some months before the safety issues can be fully resolved. In the meantime LCR tell me that the traffic projections for these services are being considered as part of the forecasts for the business referred to in my answer of today to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway).

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what expenditure his Department has incurred on the provision of a sleeping car service to run to Europe, via the Channel Tunnel, for the regions of Britain; and if he will make a statement. [38618]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The rolling stock for this service was procured in 1992 by European Night Services Limited (ENS) using a lease purchase facility. ENS is a joint venture company owned by Eurostar (UK) Limited along with the national railways of France, Germany and Holland. Whilst there has been very little actual public financing of this venture, Eurostar (UK) Limited's share

of the capital value of the lease was scored as public expenditure when the company was in the public sector. The liabilities of Eurostar (UK) Ltd under the lease purchase facility are the subject of a Government Guarantee which was notified to Parliament under the normal procedures in 1996. If this Guarantee were to be called the Government's actual exposure is likely to be in the order of £105 million.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many applicants to the boards of regional development agencies are under the age of *(a)* 25 years, *(b)* 30 years and *(c)* 35 years; and if he will make a statement. [38969]

Mr. Caborn: Applications for Regional Development Agency board membership have been received from a variety of sources and full monitoring details are not yet available. Of the applications made to the Government Offices, 4 are from people under 25 years, 6 are between 25 and 29 years and 20 are between 30 and 34 years. I will write to the hon. Member when the full information is available.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to ensure that the boards of regional development agencies include young people; and if he will make a statement. [38968]

Mr. Caborn: The information pack provided to candidates made it clear that service on the board of a Regional Development Agency may be a useful development opportunity for young people. In identifying board members, consideration will be given to candidates who have demonstrated significant potential early in their careers.

Environmental Statements

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he requires the Environmental Statement submitted as part of an application for any project which will have an effect on transport volumes or patterns to include *(a)* an assessment of the number of journeys, by any means of transport, which are generated and saved, *(b)* an estimate of the projected distances of those journeys, and *(c)* an assessment of the total increase or reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutants caused as a result. [38980]

Mr. Raynsford: The requirements for the content of Environmental Statements are set by the provisions of Annex III of Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of certain public and private projects on the environment (the EIA Directive). These requirements are implemented, in the main, through the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 (SI 1988 No. 1199). Developers are required to describe the likely significant effects of the project on the environment and to describe the forecasting methods used. To assist developers, the Department issued a Good Practice Guide on the preparation of Environmental Statements in 1995. This includes guidance on assessing the impacts on air and climate and of traffic and transport.

National Parks

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy towards the use of the Sandford Principle in protecting national parks. [38981]

Angela Eagle: Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 reflects the Sandford Principle. It places a general duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to National Park purposes and, if it appears that there is a conflict between them, requires that greater weight be attached to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. My Department's policy is to promote this legislation.

County Structure Plans

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the applicability and enforcement of county structure plans drawn up before the announcement of the Government's policy on the proportion of new dwellings to be on brownfield sites. [38956]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*. Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires all decisions on planning matters to be made in accordance with the adopted development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Government Planning Guidance has for many years required local authorities to make full and effective use of previously developed land for new development, both when drawing up their development plans and in deciding planning applications. The recent statement reinforces this position. There are at the moment no regional or local land recycling targets in development plans, although authorities will be working towards developing these in the next round of regional planning guidance.

Home Buying Task Group

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the Ministerial Task Group on home buying to report. [38825]

Mr. Raynsford: We expect to make an announcement in the autumn.

Shipping Working Group

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the Shipping Working Group assessing measures to assist the United Kingdom shipping industry to report. [38827]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Shipping Working Group submitted its report to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister last month.

London Water Table

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to arrest the rising water table in

London; what impact rising water levels are having on subterranean structures; and if he will make a statement. [38747]

Angela Eagle: Thames Water plc are currently developing a strategy for alleviating groundwater levels across the area of London most likely to be affected. We expect to receive their report in about a month's time, and shall then be able to consider how to take the strategy forward. The only subterranean structures so far affected are certain parts of the Underground network. London Underground have considerable experience of dealing with groundwater and are taking action as the need arises.

Cosmetic Surgery Clinics

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of private cosmetic surgery clinics were inspected in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [39034]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is unavailable. The Health and Safety Executive does not record its contacts with duty holders at this level of detail.

Mink

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to classify mink as a pest. [38878]

Angela Eagle: There are no plans to classify the mink as a pest species.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to control the spread of wild mink in the United Kingdom. [38877]

Angela Eagle: Mink are controlled in the UK, by and large, by individual landowners.

In the 1960s Agriculture Departments carried out an eradication scheme by means of an extensive trapping campaign. The campaign ceased in 1970 when it was accepted that feral mink had become too well established and widespread for eradication to be possible. There are no plans at present for such a scheme to be revived, as any such campaign would be very unlikely to succeed.

Development Land

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for new ways of taxing development land to promote balanced development between greenfield and brownfield sites. [38872]

Mr. Raynsford: As was set out in a policy statement in February, we are seeking to open up the debate about the scope for using economic instruments to help achieve our planning objectives, including the possibility of a greenfield tax. The scope for detailed proposals has not yet been determined, and final decisions on taxation are, of course, a matter for the Chancellor.

Planning

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what evaluation his Department has carried out of the benefits of section 106 planning agreements. [38871]

Mr. Raynsford: As announced in our January 1998 Policy Statement "Modernising Planning", we are holding seminars this month with a number of stakeholders to evaluate these agreements and to discuss options for changing policy.

Subsidence

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for making compensation available to home-owners affected by subsidence caused by limestone quarrying. [38874]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no proposals to compensate home-owners for subsidence caused by limestone quarrying.

Subsidence damage to houses is generally covered under normal household insurance whatever the cause. The only statutory compensation scheme is for subsidence due to coal mining under the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, as amended by the Coal Industry Act 1994. In other cases of subsidence damage, it is open to home-owners and/or their insurers to take action in Common Law against the person who caused the damage. It would not be appropriate for the Government to act as insurer of last resort in such cases.

Liverpool Lifeboat Station

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the implications of the possible closure of the lifeboat station at Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [39012]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No representations have been received on the possible closure of Liverpool lifeboat station. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution state they have no plans to close any lifeboat station in the Liverpool area.

Nuclear Waste

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will *(a)* impose restrictions on and *(b)* eliminate in the long-term the transportation of nuclear waste. [39048]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department implements and enforces appropriate regulations to ensure that all radioactive material, including nuclear waste, is transported safely. These regulations are subject to continuous review to ensure they are kept up-to-date and effective.

London Referendum Campaign

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public funds are available for the London Referendum Campaign; and who may apply for them. [38738]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government have made it clear that no public funds will be made available to groups campaigning on the London referendum.

London Mayor

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to set limits on election expenses for candidates for the London Mayoralty; and what statutory provision applies to the date on which election expenses are first incurred. [38736]

Mr. Raynsford: We said in our White Paper, "A Mayor and Assembly for London", that there will need to be a limit on the amount that candidates for the Mayor and Assembly can spend. Subject to a "Yes" vote in the referendum on 7 May we will introduce legislation to establish the Greater London Authority. The legislation will set the level of these expenses and we will consult the Association of London Government before taking decisions.

The date from which election expenses might first be incurred is not prescribed in statute.

Building Control Services

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure local authorities are able to compete on equal terms with the private sector for building control services contracts. [38741]

Mr. Raynsford: Wider competition between approved inspectors and local authority building control should be a stimulus to greater efficiency and higher standards of service to the customer. To help bring about this result, I am working to devolve the setting of charges for local authority building control to individual local authorities. I also wish to see arrangements put in place for setting and monitoring compliance with common standards of building control applicable across the public and private sectors. I therefore welcome the establishment by the Local Government Association, the Construction Industry Council and the Association of Corporate Approved Inspectors of a Steering Group to draw up recommended standards and monitoring arrangements.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in respect of the provision of building control services by private contractors. [38740]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department receives letters from time to time about the performance of approved inspectors carrying out building control functions, as well as about the performance of local authority building control officers.

A46/47 Link Road

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons the original side road orders for the Leicester A46/47 link road scheme have been superseded by temporary closure side road orders; and what factors underlay the length of time taken between the posting of the side orders and commencement of work. [38957]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The A46/47 link road is a local road for which Leicester City Council are the local highway authority. Following a public inquiry in 1995 the Side Roads Orders were confirmed in August 1997. Before implementing the authority of a Side Roads Order a local highway authority must ensure that there already exists, or they have provided, a reasonably convenient alternative to highways being stopped up by an authority of that Order. This often entails the making of temporary closure orders under the Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Temporary closure orders under this Act may also be required to enable some construction works to be carried out. I understand that Leicester City Council have recently advertised their intention for some temporary closures to enable construction works. Under the Traffic Regulation Act highway authorities must give not less than 7 days' notice of their intention to make such temporary closures, which includes dates of commencement and duration of the closure.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the supplementary credit approval awarded to Leicester City Council for the construction of the A46/47 link road scheme has been used *(a)* effectively and *(b)* within the time period allowed. [38958]

Ms Glenda Jackson: When my Department issues supplementary credit approvals (SCA) for a scheme such as the A46/47 link road the certificate that formalises the arrangement makes it clear that the resources are to be used only on the named scheme. It is for the Audit Commission to determine in due course whether an authority has made proper use of all the resources it receives under the Transport Policies and Programme system. The continuation of funding to a participating authority under that system is dependent on my Department's receipt of satisfactory annual audit certificates. SCA are issued for a specific financial year. Local authorities know that if they are unable to use the resources fully in that year they must surrender the unused portion for reallocation. It is a function of the audit procedure to verify that authorities have fulfilled this requirement.

Valuations (Commercial Properties)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change the regulations concerning the valuation arrangements for commercial properties which include domestic areas within the overall property. [39199]

Mr. Raynsford: None. Where a property is used for both commercial and domestic purposes, the rateable value is based only on the commercial use. It does not include the value of the property as living accommodation. This is dealt with entirely separately, through a Council Tax assessment.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects

to publish his White Paper on the UK strategy to meet the target of 20 per cent. reduction on carbon dioxide emissions in 1990. [38985]

Angela Eagle: The Government plan to publish a consultation paper on climate change this summer. This will focus on policy options for meeting our legally binding target from Kyoto, but also look at measures that would move beyond that towards our aim of a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions. We are inviting views from all sectors throughout this consultation process.

Rail Subsidies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each of the next five years the Government subsidy to be paid to *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* each train operating company. [37919]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[pursuant to her reply, 8 April 1998, c. 291–92]:* The information in the table was incorrect, the following table gives the correct figures.

£ million (1997–98 prices)

	1998–99	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Anglia Railways	26.0	22.1	16.0	13.0	8.6
Cardiff Railways	18.1	17.1	15.8	15.0	14.3
Central Trains	122.9	109.0	103.4	99.9	96.9
Virgin Cross Country	98.1	82.2	73.9	67.8	50.5
Gatwick Express	–7.9	–9.8	–10.7	–11.5	–12.0
Great Eastern	14.0	8.1	2.8	–0.3	–5.1
Great Western Trains	53.9	47.8	41.4	34.0	27.3
Great North Eastern Railway	36.3	16.5	6.2	2.0	0.1
Virgin West Coast	68.4	56.1	53.7	52.3	–3.9
Island Line	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.0	—
LTS Rail	25.1	23.4	21.9	20.6	19.3
Merseyside Electrics	6.5	5.9	5.7	5.4	5.5
Midland Mainline	2.4	0.9	–0.6	–2.6	–4.4
Connex South Central	54.8	46.9	43.4	38.3	35.9
Silverlink	35.5	29.6	26.4	23.0	20.0
North Western Trains	89.8	81.6	74.9	71.7	69.0
Regional Railways North East	122.9	109.5	102.3	97.3	93.7
Scotrail Railways	120.5	114.0	106.9	100.3	95.2
Wales & West Railway	62.2	57.4	51.4	47.5	44.0
South West Trains	60.8	55.7	50.5	45.2	35.7
Thames Trains	24.8	17.0	13.5	7.6	3.8
Thameslink Rail	–6.7	–16.2	–22.5	–23.2	–27.0
Chiltern Railway	12.6	9.9	6.7	4.7	3.3
Connex South Eastern	85.1	61.1	49.1	40.4	32.6
West Anglia Great Northern	34.7	25.4	13.1	4.3	–14.6
Total	1,162.7	973.0	847.0	753.7	588.7
Total with gross PTE costs	1,575.7	1,352.3	1,203.3	1,092.3	915.0
Total with net PTE costs	1,494.5	1,271.1	1,122.1	1,011.2	833.9

Environmental Task Force

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the access to set-up funding for organisations acting as deliverers of the Environmental Task Force options of the New Deal to ensure adequate investment in infrastructure. [35908]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Chief Executive of the Employment Service recently announced a scheme whereby voluntary organisations, including those delivering ETF provision, can have some of their first year's contract value in advance, to meet set-up costs, immediately a contract is signed. The maximum amount available is whichever is the lower of £30,000 or 20 per cent. of the first year's expected contract value.

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps are being taken to increase the national profile of the voluntary sector and Environmental Task Force options of the New Deal. [35927]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Our national advertising campaign features a range of voluntary and environmental organisations and from April will include two new television commercials to specifically promote these options. Inquiries generated in this way are answered by the New Deal Information Line and Website, for example by sending information packs. Factsheets and other publicity material aimed at both clients and option providers are also available through Jobcentres and local partner organisations. The New Deal Task Force is also working to raise the profile of these options.

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *479*, if he will publish the set of environmental objectives developed by his Department, against which Environmental Task Force projects will be assessed. [35951]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The list of environmental objectives, developed by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, against which Environment Task Force (ETF) bids will be assessed was published as an Annex to the

specification for the ETF, which was issued by the Employment Service to organisations wishing to bid to deliver ETF provision.

A copy of the list has been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those visits made within the United Kingdom since 1 May on which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers within her Department have been accompanied under Rule 83 of the Ministerial Code indicating (i) those persons accompanying and (ii) the cost to public funds. [23763]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 19 January 1998]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is not available in the form requested. However, the following information is available:

	Dates	*Persons accompanying*	*Total cost[1] (£)*
Secretary of State	30/05/97 to 15/02/98	Spouse, children, parents	7,364
Adam Ingram, MP	09/05/97 to 16/03/98	Spouse	3,044
Tony Worthington, MP	13/06/97 to 02/03/98	Spouse	1,839
Lord Dubs	16/05/97 to 06/03/98	Spouse, child	1,588

[1] Includes cost of cars, flights and duty weekends in Northern Ireland

Departmental Pay

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people employed by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the agencies for which her Department is responsible earn (i) less than £3.20 per hour, (ii) between £3.20 and £3.60 per hour, (iii) between £3.60 and £4 per hour and (iv) between £4 and £4.62 per hour. [30755]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 23 February 1998]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

	(i)	*(ii)*	*(iii)*	*(iv)*
Non Industrial Staff[1]	81	1,656	555	1,797
Industrial Staff				
Department	—	—	21	177
Agencies	—	—	—	960

[1] The split of non-industrial staff between Departments and agencies is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Conferences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of her officials attended conferences *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas; and how many and what percentage made (i) oral and (ii) written contributions to the matters under discussion in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [31171]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments for 1997 is as follows:

(a) 1,563

(b) 305

(i) 406 (21.7%)

(ii) 229 (12.3%)

Information relating to United Kingdom conferences attended by Department of the Environment Officials is not included as this could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Surveys

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list each information, promotional, marketing and opinion survey contract, with its value, concluded by her Department and its agencies for the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–2001 and *(e)* 2001–2002. [32019]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many meetings of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council were held in 1997. [33592]

Marjorie Mowlam: Three: on 7 February, 8 May and 14 November. These were meetings of the Education and Culture Sub-Committee. There were also 3 meetings of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was established under the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council.

Radio Telefis Eireann

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the cost to United Kingdom public funds of the onward transmission of Radio Telefis Eireann into Northern Ireland; who will pay the costs incurred within the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement on the discussion of the matter at the Anglo-Irish Conference on 6 March. [34614]

Marjorie Mowlam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for broadcasting policy. His officials and UK broadcasters are currently discussing with their Irish counterparts proposals to increase power to extend the coverage of RTE services within Northern Ireland. Before my right hon. Friend can agree to any such increased power transmissions, the necessary engineering work to protect UK services will have to be undertaken. The costs of any engineering work required in the UK which forms part of any UK-Irish agreement to extend RTE reception in Northern Ireland will be wholly funded by the Irish.

We discussed plans for the early extension of RTE transmission throughout Northern Ireland at the Intergovernmental conference meeting on 5 March.

Lawther Day Centre, Belfast

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has for the future use of the Lawther Day Centre in College Park Avenue, Belfast. [37159]

Mr. Worthington: I understand that the South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is seeking planning approval to develop an Adolescent Resource Centre on this site which will provide a focus for its Adolescent Services and facilitate an improved inter-agency and multi-disciplinary approach to young people and their families.

Mobile Phones

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the maximum effective radiated power permitted from a mobile phone base station. [37097]

Mr. Worthington: I am advised by the Radio Communications Agency, which is the licensing authority for these operations, that the maximum effective radiated power permitted from a mobile phone base station should not exceed 30 dBW (decibel watts).

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the long-term effects of exposure to radiation from mobile phones and base stations. [37099]

Mr. Worthington: No specific research has been commissioned in relation to Northern Ireland. However, the Department of Health has commissioned two studies on biological effects of microwaves as part of its Radiation Protection Research Programme. The first is investigating the influence of radiation on learning ability and behaviour. The other is a laboratory study looking for biological responses from human cells in the electromagnetic radiation field. That Department is also contributing to the World Health Organisation's International Electromagnetic Field project, which includes the health effects of microwaves.

The Government obtain advice from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) on the risks to health of exposure to electromagnetic fields. NRPB's advice is that mobile phones and base stations currently operating in the United Kingdom comply with the recommended exposure limits.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of radioactive discharges from Sellafield on the health of people in Northern Ireland. [37104]

Mr. Worthington: None.

Mediation Network

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 27, under whose authority Mediation Network facilitates links between the RUC and others, *(a)* nationally and *(b)* internationally; with what activities relating to the RUC it has been involved; to whom the body is accountable in respect of Government funding received; and what accounts have been published. [37385]

Mr. Ingram: The Mediation Network is an independent association formed to develop alternative, non-violent approaches to conflicts and disputes in different settings in Northern Ireland. It therefore needs no authority other than the agreement of those it works with.

The Mediation Network has already worked with the Royal Ulster Constabulary training branch on the RUC's Community Awareness programme. The current project is intended to develop with the RUC, as service providers, and others ideas for the evolution of policing and community relations in Northern Ireland.

The Mediation Network is accountable to the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council for its financial assistance and the latter is in turn accountable to the Department of Finance and Personnel, by which it is funded under the Community Relations Programme.

The last published accounts for both the Mediation Network and for the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council cover the financial year ending 31 March 1997.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 27, what studies have been commissioned by her Department from Mediation Network, and what studies or recommendations have been offered to her Department by Mediation Network, in relation to the future structure or operation of the RUC; and if she will place a copy of such papers in the Library. [37380]

Mr. Ingram: The Northern Ireland Office, through its Statistics and Research Branch, is currently part funding a Mediation Network project entitled 'Policing Our Divided Society'. This particular project was proposed by the Mediation Network in consultation with the RUC, and contributes to the RUC's Policing in Partnership strategy. The Mediation Network approached the Northern Ireland Office, amongst others, to seek funding.

The Mediation Network has identified the aim of the project as 'To Assist the Evolution of Policing and Community Relations in Northern Ireland'. Work will involve discussions with various groups about policing in Northern Ireland including with the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as the service providers.

The Mediation Network will produce a report for the NIO which summarises points of significance emerging from the process. In due course, a summary of the main conclusion will be published.

Peace Process (Public Relations)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding has been set aside for

public relations exercises relating to a possible talks agreement; what PR companies are involved; what budget has been identified for the exercise; and if she will make a statement. [37382]

Marjorie Mowlam: My principal concern in this area is to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have available to them all of the information which they need in order to take a decision on any agreement which may be reached, in a referendum.

Accordingly, I propose to make arrangements to have an agreement circulated as widely as possible to the people of Northern Ireland.

The total budget for printing and distribution of the agreement, the related costs of making known both its availability and the arrangements for the referendum cannot yet be predicted.

I have no proposals to involve any PR company in this work. Any advertising necessary to publicise arrangements for making the agreement available publicly will be handled by an advertising agency already contracted to the Northern Ireland Office for other ongoing work.

Sinn Fein

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 19 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *724–725*, on Sinn Fein, if she will place a copy of the RUC Code Regulation in the Library. [37812]

Mr. Ingram: The RUC Code Regulation is a Confidential document and therefore cannot be made public.

Maze Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents involving violent behaviour or assaults have been reported in each of the past four years in HMP Maze; how many complaints have been registered of assaults on prison officers; how many disciplinary charges have been initiated as a result; of these, how many charges led to further punishments; how many complaints have been registered as assaults on inmates; how many disciplinary charges were initiated as a result; and of these how many charges led to disciplinary action. [37679]

Mr. Ingram: There was a total of 67 incidents involving violent behaviour or assaults reported in HMP Maze 1994 to 1997. The total is broken down as follows:

1994—11
1995—25
1996—18
1997—8

There have been a total of 208 complaints which have been registered as assaults on Prison Staff at HMP Maze, 179 disciplinary charges were initiated as a result, of which 38 charges led to further punishments.

There have been 26 complaints registered as assaults against inmates during the four years in question. 3 disciplinary charges were initiated as a result, but disciplinary action is still pending.

Prisoners (Remission)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will estimate the number of existing prisoners convicted of scheduled offences remaining in prison in each year until the last is released, assuming no new convictions, under *(a)* the current, *(b)* a 66 per cent. and *(c)* a 75 per cent. rate of remission. [37829]

Mr. Ingram: Statistical information in the precise form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am nevertheless able to provide statistical information on a similar point which has been previously produced. The following table is based on prisoners serving determinate sentences of three years or more; held at Maghaberry or Maze for offences connected to terrorism; and who will be released after 30 April 1998.

Number of prisoners convicted of scheduled offences remaining in prison at the end of each year under current arrangements, 66% and 75% rates of remission

End of year	*Current arrangements*	*66% remission*	*75% remission*
1998	250	109	38
1999	182	59	9
2000	126	26	3
2001	84	8	2
2002	47	2	2
2003	31	2	1
2004	18	1	—
2005	8	1	—
2006	3	1	—
2007	1	—	—
2008	1	—	—
2009	1	—	—
2010	1	—	—
2011	1	—	—
2012	—	—	—

Notes:

1. Current prisoners for whom 66% and 75% remission would mean prior or immediate release, are included in figures for 1998.
2. Determinate sentenced prisoners serving sentences of three years or more; held at Maghaberry or Maze for scheduled offences; and who will be released after 30 April 1998.
3. Excludes: Life Sentence prisoners and prisoners detained at Secretary of State's Pleasure; remand; and fine default prisoners.

Accident Treatment Costs

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the total cost of treating accidents and other injuries in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months. [37322]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The information requested is not available in the format requested.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the projected number of osteoporotic fractures in Northern Ireland in the next 12 months and the number of *(a)* orthopaedic beds and *(b)* days of hospitalisation required to treat them. [37334]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Services are not planned in the detailed way pre-supposed by this question and therefore no estimate of the numbers referred to are available. However, in 1996/97, a total of 96 persons with a primary diagnosis of osteoporotic fracture were treated as inpatients in Northern Ireland hospitals. This treatment involved 1,685 bed-days.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the number of visits and repeat visits to GPs in Northern Ireland occasioned by osteoporosis. [37306]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Information on the number of visits and repeat visits made to GPs about specific conditions is not collected centrally.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the cost of treating osteoporotic fractures in the last 12 months. [37323]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Based on the number of finished consultant episodes during 1996/97 in relation to osteoporotic fractures, expenditure amounted to approximately £582,000. The latter figures refer to inpatient episodes only.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the incidence of osteoporosis; and what estimate she has made of the cost of osteoporosis to the NHS in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months. [37314]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Information on the incidence of osteoporosis is not available centrally. The data available, however, show that, during the financial year 1996/97, 1,167 persons with a primary diagnosis of osteoporosis were treated as inpatients in Northern Ireland hospitals. Data are not collected in such a way that allows the cost of osteoporosis to the Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland to be estimated.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many health boards have an osteoporosis strategy in place; and if she will list them. [37310]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The four Health and Social Services Boards are aware of the significance of this condition as a public health problem and are at various stages in the development of strategies; these include guidelines for the secondary prevention of osteoporosis, protocols for onward referral and treatment of patients with osteoporosis; and measures intended to prevent the occurrence of osteoporosis.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of *(a)* accidents and *(b)* orthopaedic hospital admissions in Northern Ireland are directly attributable to osteoporosis. [37327]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Data on *(a)* accidents are not collected in the form required. It is not therefore possible to answer the question. However, by way of information, in 1996/97, 145 (or 1 per cent.) of emergency inpatient admissions were assigned a primary diagnosis of osteoporosis.

With regard to *(b)* there are no orthopaedic hospitals in Northern Ireland. During 1996/97, a total of 39 (or 0.25 per cent.) persons with a primary or secondary diagnosis of osteoporosis were treated as inpatients in the Trauma & Orthopaedics (T&O) specialty in Northern Ireland hospitals.

Bill of Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will take steps to ensure that the terms of the UN Basic Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal and Summary Executions are included on the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [37888]

Marjorie Mowlam *[holding answer 8 April 1998]:* We will bear this in mind.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Computer Fraud

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to ensure that the Serious Fraud Office has the human and technical resources to tackle successfully computer fraud. [38979]

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office has a team of staff dedicated to deal with all computer-related issues on all cases: for example the seizure and processing of material during an investigation as well as presentation of material at trial.

If the SFO were to require a particular expertise or technical resource that was not available internally then a competitive arrangement for selecting the provider on value for money criteria would be put into operation.

Crown Business Communications

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Attorney-General if he authorised the employment of Crown Communications by the Director of Public Prosecutions. [38719]

The Attorney-General: I was aware that CPS management was considering how to handle the Glidwell Report and the Government's response to it with a view to informing their staff of the Government's decisions. I was not aware that Crown Business Communications were being considered for this purpose. Internal communications within the CPS are not my responsibility but that of CPS management subject to my general power of superintendence. I shall be considering the handling of the Glidwell Report with the Director of Public Prosecutions in due course.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total cost to the public purse of the employment of Crown Communications by the Director of Public Prosecutions. [38720]

The Attorney-General: Nothing. No contract has been signed between Crown Business Communications and the Crown Prosecution Service. If it is decided to use the company it will be paid for items of work only when they have been identified and agreed.

Thefts

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from *(a)* his office

and *(b)* the offices of the Crown Prosecution Service in the last five years indicating the approximate value of each item stolen. [37974]

The Attorney-General: I am able to provide the following information:

(a) A laptop computer worth approximately £700 was stolen from the Attorney-General's Office in July 1996. There is no record of any other theft of equipment in the period specified.

(b) Equipment stolen from the offices of the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last five financial years together with approximate values, is as follows:

	Non IT Equipment		*IT Equipment*	
Year	*Number*	*Cost (£)*	*Number*	*Cost (£)*
1993/94	8	1,650	24	19,375
1994/95	12	6,672	17	8,524
1995/96	14	4,327	22	22,035
1996/97	11	1,884	15	21,755
1997/98	2	1,200	1	2,200
Total	47	15,733	79	73,889

Full details of stolen CPS equipment is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals he has consulted concerning the Social Exclusion Unit; and if he will make a statement. [38291]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Officials in the Welsh Office have had informal discussions with a number of bodies in Wales about ways to construct an effective programme to tackle Social Exclusion. These include the Welsh Local Government Association, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Swansea City Council and the University of Glamorgan. We intend to publish proposals for formal consultation in early May.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken to secure the future of post offices in rural Wales, with particular reference to Flintshire; and if he will make a statement. [38461]

Mr. Hain: The Government fully recognise the importance of the post office network, especially in rural areas, and are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices. In announcing recently the next stage of the Review of the Post Office, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade reaffirmed this commitment. In the context of the Review, we shall be examining closely further scope for sustaining and strengthening the viability of the post office network as a whole.

New Deal (Delinquency)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to monitor the impact of the New Deal on young people with a history of delinquency. [38458]

Mr. Hain: The term "delinquency" is very broad and could legitimately be defined as including a range of anti-social behaviour, some of which could not be identified formally, for example through a criminal record.

As a key part of the evaluation of the New Deal, we will seek to relate the outcomes of the New Deal participants to their individual characteristics, circumstances and labour market history, and to assess the extent to which these outcomes might have occurred in the absence of the New Deal.

As part of this work, we shall be addressing the significance of a criminal record in employment and the success of the New Deal in overcoming barriers it may create.

National Assembly

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the venue for the National Assembly in Cardiff will be announced. [38452]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will announce the venue when I have made my decision.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 399, if he will make a statement on the way in which the Welsh Health Common Services Authority accumulated its reserves; and if he will give figures on the level of these reserves at the end of each of the past five financial years. [38462]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Welsh Health Common Services Authority has accumulated its reserves in the course of its normal trading activity within the NHS.

Year	*£000*
1992–93	5,185
1993–94	17,271
1994–95	16,776
1995–96	12,121
1996–97	7,249

Source:
Annual accounts of Welsh Health Commons Services Authority 1992–93 to 1996–97.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the savings to his Department's expenditure on the Welsh Health Common Services Authority budget in relation to the Authority's fully repairing and insuring lease on Crickhowell House by extending the defects liability period beyond *(a)* 12 months, *(b)* 24 months, *(c)* 36 months and *(d)* 48 months. [38442]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information is not available in the form requested. The landlord has paid for all repair work during the Defects Liability Period and there has been no effect on the budget of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority who are responsible for managing the building.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what period the defects liability period on the lease of Crickhowell House has been extended. [38443]

Mr. Ron Davies: The defects liability period has not been formally extended beyond 31 March 1998. Discussions are taking place with the landlord over the scope and length of a further extension.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of the consultancy study by Ove Arup Facades commissioned jointly by Welsh Health Common Services Authority and ABC into the water ingress problems in Crickhowell House. [38558]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Welsh Health Common Services Authority have not commissioned a study jointly with ABP or seen a report prepared by Ove Arup Facades.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the areas of the fabric of Crickhowell House which *(a)* have been signed off as defect-free by his Department indicating the date on which they were signed off and *(b)* have not been signed off as defect-free; and if he will make a statement. [38557]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information is not available in the form requested since defects are dealt with by the landlord in response to specific faults in particular locations. My Department have no responsibility for the day to day management of the building which is a matter for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department's lease of Crickhowell House is conditional on the whole building being signed-off as defect-free. [38783]

Mr. Ron Davies: No. There are remedies contained in the lease for the rectification of defects.

Dyfed-Powys Health Authority

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the dates when the appointments of the members of the Board of the Dyfed-Powys Health Authority are due to terminate. [38658]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Dyfed Powys Health Authority Membership:

Mrs. Vanessa J. Bourne: 30 June 1998
Prof. John Williams: 31 March 2000
Mr. Kenneth Cross: 31 March 2000
Dr. Morton Davies: 31 March 2000
Dr. Ainsley Reid: 31 March 2000
Mr. Peter Swanson: 31 March 2000
Ms Carys Evans: 31 March 2002

There is one vacancy.

Railway Investment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he has taken to encourage increased investment in the railway service in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39280]

Mr. Hain: Investment in rail infrastructure is primarily a matter for Railtrack, with the Government supporting rail services through the franchise agreements with operators. One of the main objectives of the Government's new integrated transport policy will be to win more passengers and freight on to the railways. The policy will be set out in a UK White Paper to be published later in the spring, together with a complementary transport policy statement for Wales. In the meantime, I am discussing with train operators the scope for improving services from North to South Wales.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proposals for the dairy industry in Wales. [39273]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The proposals for the dairy industry are part of the Agenda 2000 reform package which has recently been published by the European Commission. The proposals have been broadly welcomed by the UK Government. The Welsh Office will continue to work closely with farming unions in Wales to identify and argue for the needs of both Welsh dairy farmers and Welsh agriculture in general as discussions move forward.

Quangos

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Black and Asian people have been appointed to Welsh quangos since 1 May 1997. [38946]

Mr. Ron Davies: I am keen to secure a wider field of candidates for public appointments who are representative of all parts of Wales. In particular, I want to encourage more candidates from those groups currently under-represented in public appointments which includes people from ethnic minorities.

Information about the ethnic origin of candidates for appointments is provided in confidence. Whilst I have appointed people from ethnic minority backgrounds to public bodies in Wales it would be a breach of that confidence to disclose the details because the numbers are such that the ethnic origin of individuals could be identified.

Endangered Species

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how the action plans for endangered species and habitats prepared by Forest Enterprise would be taken forward and adapted in Wales under the separate exercise of forestry functions in England, Scotland and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38626]

Mr. Win Griffiths: That part of Forest Enterprise's action plan for endangered species and habitats which relates to Wales is subject at present to direction by the Secretary of State for Wales. After devolution it will be subject to direction by the National Assembly for Wales.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if an order under subsection 1(1)(b) in Schedule 6 to the Government of Wales Bill could exempt Forestry Commissioners in Wales from applying the recently agreed UK Forestry standard; and if he will make a statement. [38627]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Assembly will inherit the UK Forestry Standard. Subsequently, it will be for the Assembly to decide the standards which the Commission will apply in Wales.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if, following the proposed separation of functions in relation to Wales, the Forestry Commission will *(a)* produce a framework document and supporting corporate plan for Wales and *(b)* address nature conservation objectives and targets previously agreed on a Great Britain basis; and if he will make a statement. [38625]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Forestry Commission will prepare separate corporate plans for England, Scotland and Wales covering all the Commission's objectives including nature conservation.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the requirements which could be disregarded by Forestry Commissioners in Wales subject to a order under subsection 1(1)(b) in Schedule 6 to the Government of Wales Bill; and if he will make a statement. [38624]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The purpose of the powers provided by subsection 1(1)(b) of Schedule 6 of the Government of Wales Bill is to allow the Forestry Commissioners to exercise their functions in Wales separately and distinctly from England and Scotland. In exercising their functions in Wales, the Forestry Commissioners would not be obliged to have regard to the circumstances of, or requirements in, England or Scotland.

NHS Trusts

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the review of the number and share of NHS trusts in Wales to report. [38813]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I intend to consult on proposals to reduce the number of NHS trusts in Wales between June and September this year. This should enable my right hon. Friend and I to make final decisions during October 1998.

Trunk Road Programme

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the strategic review of the Welsh trunk road programme to report. [38819]

Mr. Hain: Details of the strategy for, and the role of, the Welsh trunk road programme will be included in the report on the review which will be published later this year.

Childcare Working Group

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the review of the Welsh childcare strategy working group will be published. [38812]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I met the Welsh Childcare Working Group on Friday 17 April. Their views will contribute to my proposals for the Childcare Strategy in Wales, which I expect to publish soon.

Environmental Task Force

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the implementation of the work of the Environmental Task Force in Wales. [38731]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The New Deal for 18–24 year olds began in West Wales in January and in the rest of Wales on 6 April. The Employment Service has contracted with lead organisations to deliver the environment option of the New Deal. This option offers opportunities for young people to train and gain valuable work experience whilst meeting broad environmental objectives.

Nursery Education (Welsh Language)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister for School Standards of 24 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 398–99, if he will make a statement on the accessibility of Welsh-medium nursery education in all parts of Wales. [37145]

Mr. Hain: In securing nursery education places under early years development plans, each early years development partnership must give full consideration to parental demand for Welsh-medium provision. In cases where a change in the balance of provision between the maintained and voluntary sectors is proposed, the plan must state how this will enhance and not damage the accessibility and sustainability of Welsh-medium education.

These requirements are clearly set out in the Welsh Office guidance on early years education issued this year. Plans have to be submitted to the Welsh Office by 31 May for approval.

Public Appointments

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appointments he has made to Welsh non-departmental public bodies since 1 May 1997; how many of the appointments were *(a)* men and *(b)* women; how many existing appointees hold more than one post; and if he will list them. [38753]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have made it my general practice to advertise publicly and widely for candidates for the appointments which I make, to attract a new kind of candidate who is more representative of the whole life and community of Wales. This especially applies to the efforts to secure applications from women for these appointments, and I am determined to increase their representation on public bodies in Wales.

Recent initiatives in the media have attracted interest from a number of potential women candidates from across Wales. My Department and I are committed to building on the success of these initiatives with similar exercises in the future.

Between 1 May 1997 and 1 March 1998, I made 110 appointments, either singly or jointly. 78 were to men, and 32 to women. The number of appointments held by women has risen from 26 per cent. to 28 per cent. in the period between December 1997 and March 1998.

There are currently 54 people who hold more than one appointment. I will write separately with the details.

Information on all appointments that I make is published in "Appointments made by the Secretary of State for Wales". A copy of this publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Gwent Tertiary College

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if all the ESF funding received by Gwent Tertiary College for each project in the 1995 to 1997 period has been used for the purpose intended; [38900]

(2) if he will list the amount of ESF funding received by Gwent Tertiary College for each individual project for the period 1995 to 1997, together with the amount each project has already received from the college. [38899]

Mr. Hain: I am anxious that my hon. Friend receives all the information he has asked for on this matter. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as I have obtained the information from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment as detailed questions of this kind on the European Social Fund are either matters for his Department or for the College itself.

Territorial Army

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact on employment of the Territorial Army in Wales. [38457]

Dr. Reid: I have been asked to reply.

As at 1 April this year, there were 3,282 members of TA units based in Wales, and these were supported by 138 Regular Army personnel, 79 Non Regular Permanent Staff and 194 other civilian staff.

No assessment has been made of the overall impact of the Territorial Army on employment in Wales.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Footpaths

36. Mr. Pickthall: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what plans the Church Commissioners have for improving footpath access and maintenance on their estates. [37444]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The Commissioners are committed to protecting footpath access and ensuring that public rights of way are respected.

Royal Peculiars

Mr. Key: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what are the duties and responsibilities of the Church Commissioners in respect of Royal Peculiars, with particular reference to Westminster Abbey. [38592]

Mr. Stuart Bell: Royal Peculiars exercise their own jurisdiction and the Commissioners have no responsibility for their affairs.

Policy and Finance

Mr. Key: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, to whom the Church Commissioners are *(a)* answerable on policy matters and *(b)* financially accountable; and if he will make a statement. [38594]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The Commissioners are answerable on policy and financial matters to Parliament and to the General Synod of the Church of England. Their annual report and accounts together with any resolution passed by the Commissioners with reference thereto are laid before both Houses of Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department and before the General Synod by its Secretary General.

Appointments

Mr. Key: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list by name and title *(a)* the Church Commissioners, *(b)* the Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners with their dates of appointment and retirement and *(c)* the membership of the Estates and Finance Committee of the Church Commissioners. [38593]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The information that the hon. Member requires is listed below. It should be noted that the duties of the former Estates and Finance Committee are now largely the responsibility of the Assets and General Purposes Committees.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS AS OF APRIL 1998

Chairman: The Most Reverend and Right Hon. G. L. Carey—*Archbishop of Canterbury*

Church Estate Commissioners appointed by:

Her Majesty

Sir Michael Colman Bt—*First Church Estates Commissioner*

S. Bell MP[1]—*Second Church Estates Commissioner*

The Archbishop of Canterbury

Mrs. M. H. Laird—*Third Church Estates Commissioner*

Elected by the General Synod:

The Venerable G. G. Gibson—*Archdeacon of Auckland*

The Venerable S. R. Lowe—*Archdeacon of Sheffield*

The Venerable D. K. R. Gerrard—*Archdeacon of Wandsworth*

The Reverend Canon R. M. Baker

The Reverend Canon J. A. Stanley

The Reverend S. J. Trott

The Reverend Canon H. E. Wilcox

The Reverend Canon D. G. Williams

Mrs. J. M. Atkinson

The Viscountess Brentford OBE FCA

P. N. E. Bruinvels

Mrs. D. Chatterley

A. Cooper OBE

Mrs. P. R. Granger

P. A. Lovegrove

J. F. M. Smallwood CBE

T. J. P. Stevenson AIA APMI

D. E. S. Webster

Elected by the deans and provosts:

The Very Reverend P. A. Berry—*Provost of Birmingham*

The Very Reverend D. Frayne—*Provost of Blackburn*

The Very Reverend H. E. C. Stapleton—*The Dean of Carlisle*

The Very Reverend J. H. Moses—*Dean of St. Paul's*

Nominated by:

Her Majesty

Sir Richard Baker Wilbraham Bt

R. Heskett FRICS

J. H. M. Newsum FRICS

R. M. Shaw

The Archbishop of Canterbury

D. E. Fellows FIA FPMI

Miss P. M. Lancaster

M. J. Moriarty CBE

E. G. Nugee QC

Aldermen of the City of London

P. A. Bull FRICS

Sir Christopher Leaver CBE

Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University

The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Nairne GCB MC

Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University

O. N. Dawson

Ex officio:

The Archbishop of York

The 41 Diocesan Bishops

The Lord Chancellor

The First Lord of the Treasury

The President of the Council

The Speaker of the House of Commons

The Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Lord Chief Justice

The Master of the Rolls

The Attorney-General

The Solicitor-General

The Lord Mayor of London

The Lord Mayor of York

Secretary to the Commissioners

P. Locke CBE

[1] Entitled to attend and speak at any Committee.

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

The Board transacts the functions and business of the Commissioners except where, by statute or with the Board's approval, these are exercised by Committees.

Board of Governors	*Appointed*	*Expiry*
The Most Reverend and Right Honourable G. L. Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury—Ex-officio (Chairman)	19 April 1991	—
The Most Reverend and Right Honourable D. M. Hope RCVO, Archbishop of York—Deputy Chairman	30 June 1993	AGM 1999
Sir Michael Colman Bt, First Church Estates Commissioner—Ex-officio	1 April 1993	—
S. Bell MP, Second Church Estates Commissioner—Ex-officio	12 June 1997	—
Mrs. M. H. Laird, Third Church Estates Commissioner—Ex-officio	1 January 1989	—
The Right Reverend A. D. Chesters, Bishop of Blackburn		
(as Archdeacon of Halifax)	19 July 1984	2 May 1989
(as Bishop of Blackburn)	24 September 1992	AGM 1999
The Right Reverend A. M. A. Turnbull, Bishop of Durham	28 April 1988	AGM 2002
The Right Reverend and Rt. Hon. R. J. C. Chartres, Bishop of London	12 December 1995	AGM 1999
The Right Reverend P. J. Nott, Bishop of Norwich	30 June 1993	AGM 1999
The Very Reverend D. Frayne, Provost of Blackburn	19 June 1996	AGM 2002
The Very Reverend J. H. Moses, Dean of St. Paul's	28 April 1988	AGM 1999
The Venerable G. G. Gibson, Archdeacon of Auckland	1 April 1993	AGM 2002
The Venerable S. R. Lowe, Archdeacon of Sheffield	28 April 1994	AGM 2002
The Reverend Canon R. M. Baker	27 April 1995	AGM 1999
The Reverend Canon J. A. Stanley	28 April 1988	AGM 1999
The Reverend Canon H. E. Wilcox	29 February 1996	AGM 1999
The Reverend Canon D. G. Williams	23 January 1997	AGM 2002
The Viscountess Brentford OBE FCA	1 April 1993	AGM 1999
A. Cooper OBE	1 April 1993	AGM 1999
Mrs. P. R. Granger	1 June 1991	AGM 2002
Miss P. M. Lancaster	28 April 1995	AGM 1999
P. A. Lovegrove	28 April 1988	AGM 1999
E. G. Nugee QC	23 August 1993	AGM 2002
J. F. M. Smallwood CBE	17 November 1966	AGM 2002
D. E. S. Webster	29 February 1996	AGM 1999
Sir Richard Baker Wilbraham Bt (co-opted)	27 April 1995	AGM 1999
O. N. Dawson (co-opted)	27 April 1995	AGM 1999
D. E. Fellows FIA FPMI (co-opted)	29 February 1996	AGM 2002

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Has a general duty to advise the Board and, in particular, makes recommendations on the distribution of available money and on General Stipends Authority matters; is also responsible for staff matters.

Sir Michael Colman Bt, Chairman

The Bishop of Blackburn, Deputy Chairman

S. Bell MP

Mrs. M. H. Laird

The Bishop of Norwich

The Dean of St. Paul's

The Archdeacon of Auckland

The Reverend Canon J. A. Stanley

A. Cooper OBE

M. J. Moriarty CB

J. F. M. Smallwood CBE

T. J. P Stevenson AIA APMI

Committee Secretary—P. Locke CBE

ASSETS COMMITTEE

Subject to any general rules made by the Board, has an exclusive power and duty to act in all matters relating to the management of the Commissioners' assets

Sir Michael Colman Bt, Chairman

Sir Richard Baker Wilbraham Bt, Deputy Chairman

O. N. Dawson

R. Heskett FRICS

J. H. M. Newsum FRICS

R. M. Shaw

The Reverend Canon H. E. Wilcox (clerical alternate)

P. A. Lovegrove (associate member)

Committee Secretary—P. Locke CBE

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Museums and Galleries

13. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on funding for national museums. [37419]

Mr. Fisher: Funding for the national Museums and Galleries has been protected for the 1998–99 financial year. Allocations to individual institutions are unchanged from those announced by the previous Government, except for an extra £1.3 million held in reserve for the British Museum and the Tate Gallery to maintain free entry pending the outcome of the Department's spending review.

The March Budget also included the announcement of a £9 million package to promote access to Museums and Galleries.

An announcement will be made in the summer on the outcome of the Departmental Spending Review, which will inform spending decisions for 1999–2000 and beyond.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will make a statement on the criteria which he used to allocate money to *(a)* the British Museum, *(b)* the Victoria and Albert Museum, *(c)* the Natural History Museum and *(d)* the Science Museum for the year 1998–99; [38757]

(2) if he will make a statement on the criteria which he has used to allocate money for museums in 1998–99; and what plans he has to review those criteria. [38756]

Mr. Fisher: Funding for the museums and galleries sector has been protected for the 1998–99 financial year. Allocations to the national institutions are unchanged from those announced by the previous Government, except for an extra £1 million held in reserve for the British Museum (and £300 thousand for the Tate Gallery) to maintain free entry pending the outcome of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Spending Review.

In addition, the March Budget included the announcement of a £9 million package to further promote access to museums and galleries.

We are reviewing funding criteria for the museums and galleries sector as part of the Spending Review. The conclusions will be announced in the summer and will inform spending decisions for 1999–2000 and beyond.

24. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to promote more educational programmes by museums and galleries. [37431]

Mr. Fisher: This is an issue for my Department's spending review, which will be completed in the summer. Museums and galleries have great educational value and I am keen to encourage development of that role.

Football

14. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received about the structure of the Football Association Premiership and the Footb 'l League. [37420]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My colleagues the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport have received a number of representations. The governing bodies of professional football have a key role in the future of the game. They will note the wide support shown for the Ten Minute Rule Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) on 7 April.

Media Ownership

15. **Mrs. Laing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to alter the rules governing media ownership. [37421]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have no plans to alter the rules covering media ownership. The rules introduced by the Broadcasting Act 1996 have been in force for only 17 months.

National Lottery

16. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his plans for his Department's role in the disbursement of national lottery money. [37422]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Department will continue to set a framework for the distribution of Lottery money through legislation and through directions issued under that legislation. Distributors will be responsible for decisions on individual applications.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to reduce the proportion of lottery money that will go to the arts, sport, heritage and charities. [37433]

Mr. Chris Smith: The proportion of lottery income which the arts, sport, heritage and charities each receive will be amended to 16.% from 14 October 1997, subject to the passage of the necessary provision in the National Lottery Bill. Each can still expect to receive £1.8 billion over the period of the current licence. This matches their original expectation when the Lottery was launched.

NESTA Scheme

17. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received from scientists in Norwich on initiatives under the NESTA scheme. [37423]

Mr. Fisher: I have received a number of representations from organisations in the Norwich area but I am not aware of any representations specifically from scientists in Norwich.

Royal Parks (Cycle Routes)

18. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has had on the provision of cycle routes in the royal parks. [37425]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a letter from my hon. Friend, in his capacity as Secretary of the All Party Cycling Group, seeking a meeting to discuss the level of provision for cyclists in the Royal Parks.

Film Industry

19. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to respond to the development needs of the film industry. [37426]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Ms Russell) about the Film Policy Review Report, 'A Bigger Picture', which proposes new forms of public and private sector support for the vital script development process.

23. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what response he is making to the Clarke/Till review of the British film industry. [37430]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I welcome the Report. It represents a great opportunity for Government and industry to work together to create the conditions necessary for the long-term prosperity of the British film industry.

Tourism

21. **Ms Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what account he plans to take of sustainable development needs in the new tourism strategy. [37428]

Mr. Tom Clarke: We are committed to enabling tourism growth which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and our new tourism strategy will reflect that commitment.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he intends to take to encourage people from overseas to visit the United Kingdom. [37417]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department continues to support the British Tourist Authority's excellent work to promote Britain overseas as a visitor destination. As part of our work on the new strategy for tourism to be published later this year, we are looking at how further to encourage the sustainable development of both incoming and domestic tourism.

Sports Institute

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the future role of the United Kingdom sports institute. [37427]

Mr. Fisher: The United Kingdom Sports Institute's mission is to put the UK at the top of world sport by providing quality services that our elite athletes, including those with disabilities, will want to use. The Sheffield Headquarters site will co-ordinate and direct a network of centres of sporting excellence which will be accessible across Britain.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Millennium Experience

33. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what is his definition of British for the purpose of the contents of the Millennium Experience. [37441]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 27 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *217*.

34. **Mr. Cranston:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on his plans for the educational components of the Millennium Experience. [37442]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is charged with creating a Millennium Experience which is educational, inspirational, and fun. Most aspects of the Experience (both the Dome at Greenwich and the associated national programme of events and activities) will have an educational element and will support the principle of lifelong learning. Some parts of the Experience have a particular education focus—The Learning Curve and Licensed to Skill zones within the Dome will reflect the close inter-relationship of learning with the changing world of work. The national programme will provide opportunities for people to participate with educational organisations on community based local and regional learning projects. The NMEC have Education Managers in each of its twelve local offices around the country. These Managers will support and promote national programme activities and events in liaison with community groups, local authorities and local education authorities and establishments.

35. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has to appoint a new creative director for the Millennium Experience project. [37443]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *11*.

SCOTLAND

Expenditure Plans

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of his expenditure plans for each year from 1994–95 to 1999–2000 in cash and real terms at 1997–98 prices, indicating changes announced since the publication of Serving Scotland's Needs, setting out the cumulative spending planned for 1998–99 to 1999–2000 under each item in real terms and the total cumulative spending assuming that spending is maintained at 1997–98 real term levels; and if he will indicate the difference between the two cumulative totals. [36098]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 26 March 1998]:* The information for each year from 1994–95 to 1998–99 is set out in the tables which are based on information published in my Departmental Report "Serving Scotland's Needs" (Cm3914) on 9 April 1998. No plans for 1999–2000 are given as these are subject to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. As a result, the cumulative spending totals and comparison requested cannot be shown.

The Scottish Office public expenditure plans

£ million, cash

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1997–98 Changes from Serving Scotland's Needs 1997*	*1998–99 Changes from Serving Scotland's Needs 1997*
	Outturn	*Outturn*	*Outturn*	*Estimated outturn*	*Plans*		
Central government expenditure (including public corporations other than nationalised industries)							
Agriculture, fisheries and food	456	521	600	541	517	–24	–22
Industry, enterprise and training	598	599	595	578	585	–13	1
Roads and transport[1]	338	299	215	291	281	115	87
Housing	344	183	188	346	300	67	17
Scottish Homes loan repayments	—	—	—	–139	–48	11	22
Other environmental services	59	64	350	338	328	13	7
Law, order and protective services[3]	429	428	450	476	460	–3	–16
Education and sport[2]	1,211	1,250	1,293	1,281	1,187	61	–60
Arts and libraries	76	75	79	85	77	5	1
Health	3,948	4,092	4,240	4,394	4,626	18	151
Social work services	44	48	63	66	66	5	5
Other public services[3]	167	172	176	154	161	–4	5
Total central government expenditure (including public corporations)	7,670	7,731	8,249	8,411	8,540	943	737
Local authority capital expenditure	912	996	529	496	549	–73	–5
of which:							
Housing (HRA)	182	291	177	178	180	–2	0
Police	8	14	18	19	18	–1	–2
Fire	9	10	18	16	16	0	0
Provision to match receipts from European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund	114	121	136	227	123	67	–56
Central government support to local authorities current expenditure[1]	5,322	5,423	5,433	5,298	5,285	–63	11
Nationalised Industries' financing limits	–27	–22	18	26	26	4	9
Non-control total expenditure	—	—	—	22	74	22	74
of which:							
New Deal for Schools	—	—	—	9	27	9	27
Housing capital receipts initiative	—	—	—	12	44	12	44
Childcare	—	—	—	—	3	0	3
Further education colleges	—	—	—	1	—	1	0
Total expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility	13,990	14,294	14,366	14,482	14,597	208	231
of which:							
the Scottish Block	13,560	13,750	13,748	13,893	13,979	205	169

[1] Roads and Transport figures in this table include Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive (SPTE) which previously were included in central government support to local authorities current, except in 1996–97 where it is still included in the local authorities current line.

[2] Switch of resources in the 2 years shown is due to change in profile of the sale of student loan book.

[3] From 1998–99 departments will take on responsibility from Property Repayment Services (PRS) for buildings which the government owns and occupies. The change from paying rents to paying capital charges has resulted in a reduction in planned expenditure for 1998–99 of around £10 million on both the Law, Order and Protective Services and the other public service programmes, relating to the Scottish Courts estate and The Scottish Office estate respectively.

The Scottish Office public expenditure plans, real terms

£ million, 1997–98 prices

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1997–98 Changes from Serving Scotland's Needs 1997*	*1998–99 Changes from Serving Scotland's Needs 1997*
	Outturn	*Outturn*	*Outturn*	*Estimated Outturn*	*Plans*		
Central government expenditure (including public corporations other than nationalised industries)							
Agriculture, fisheries and food	495	551	616	541	502	–24	–21
Industry, enterprise and training	650	633	611	578	569	–13	1
Roads and transport	367	316	221	291	273	115	85
Housing	374	193	193	346	292	67	17
Scottish Homes loan repayments	—	—	—	–139	–47	11	21
Other environmental services	64	68	359	338	319	13	7
Law, order and protective services	466	452	462	476	447	–3	–16
Education and sport	1,316	1,321	1,328	1,281	1,154	61	–58
Arts and libraries	83	79	81	85	75	5	1
Health	4,289	4,326	4,354	4,394	4,496	18	147
Social Work services	48	51	65	66	64	5	5
Other public services	181	182	181	154	156	–4	5
Total central government expenditure (including public corporations)	8,333	8,172	8,472	8,411	8,299	943	716
Local authority capital expenditure of which:	991	1,053	543	496	534	–73	–5
Housing (HRA)	198	308	182	178	175	–2	0
Police	9	15	18	19	17	–1	–2
Fire	10	11	18	16	16	0	0
Provision to match receipts from European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund	124	128	140	227	120	67	–54
Central government support to local authorities current expenditure	5,782	5,733	5,580	5,298	5,136	–63	11
Nationalised Industries' financing limits	–29	–23	18	26	25	4	9
Non-control total expenditure from Windfall Tax	—	—	—	22	72	22	72
New Deal for Schools	—	—	—	9	26	9	26
Housing capital receipts initiative	—	—	—	12	43	12	43
Childcare	—	—	—	—	3	0	3
Further education colleges	—	—	—	1	—	1	0
Total expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility	15,199	15,062	14,754	14,482	14,186	208	224
of which:							
the Scottish Block	14,732	14,535	14,119	13,893	13,585	205	164

Note:
Real terms figures are based on the latest GDP deflators, reworked to a 1997–98 base

Scottish National Gallery

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total sum of public money involved in the preparation and presentation of the application for millennium funding towards the proposed Scottish National Gallery project; and if he will make a statement. [37128]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 31 March 1998]:* I understand that the total estimated costs incurred by the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) over the 7 year period since 1991 to date in developing their proposals to establish a new National Gallery in Glasgow were £650,000. This includes expenditure on the preparation and presentation of the two applications which they submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the first in respect of the former Post Office building in George Square and the second in respect of the former Sheriff Court building in Ingram Street.

The Glasgow Development Agency has also incurred expenditure estimated at some £400,000 on the proposed project over the past 5 years, particularly on site investigations, technical consultancies and an architectural competition. I understand that much of this expenditure would have been necessary whatever uses had been contemplated for these buildings and that little of it was directly related to the applications for Lottery funding made by the NGS.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what NHS provision is available in the Edinburgh area to support sufferers from ME; and what plans he has to increase that provision. [38309]

Mr. Galbraith: Lothian health board has indicated that there is a range of services available for patients who have been diagnosed as suffering from ME. General Medical Practitioners usually refer patients to the Infectious Disease Department of the City Hospital. Following diagnosis, patients are offered appropriate treatment for

specific symptoms, advice, counselling, psychological support and, if necessary, referral to a psychiatrist with particular expertise in ME. Lothian health board has indicated that it has no plans at present to change the range of services provided.

Fire Service

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the capital allocations to the Fire Service in the current year, with particular reference to Lothian and Borders. [37926]

Mr. McLeish: No. The fire service capital programme for 1998–99 remains, at its highest ever level, £15.6 million. From this total, Lothian and Borders Joint Fire Board has been granted a special allocation of £0.6 million both in 1997–98 and 1998–99 to assist with its major project of headquarters refurbishment. In addition the board has in each year received its full formula share of the total programme, net of top-slicing for major projects.

Higher Still

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent to date on the development and promotion of Higher Still; how much it is planned to spend in 1998–99 and 1999–2000; on what the money has been spent or will be spent; how many FTE staff have been employed on it in each year; and what estimate he has made of the total amount of staff time devoted to Higher Still in each year. [37927]

Mr. Wilson: As at 31 March 1998, some £15.3m had been directly spent on Higher Still. Planned expenditure in 1998–99 is £5.2m. A budget for 1999–2000 will be set in due course in the light of the Comprehensive Spending Review. In addition, further expenditure has been and will be incurred by local authorities, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.

This funding has covered all aspects of the development of Higher Still, including staffing and running costs associated with the Higher Still Development Unit (HSDU). Major areas of expenditure have included consultation on and the development of the new units and courses, the printing and distribution of final arrangements documents and subject guides, the provision of staff development seminars for subject leaders, work on core skills and Scottish Group Awards, and the ongoing development of a wide range of support materials, including learning and teaching materials and the National Assessment Bank.

The numbers of full time equivalent staff employed on Higher Still, by both the Higher Still Development Unit (HSDU) and The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) are as noted.

Year	*Number of FTE staff working for or with HSDU*[1]	*Number of FTE staff employed by SOEID on Higher Still*
1994–95	37.5	5.6
1995–96	39.0	6.8
1996–97	64.0	7.6
1997–98	94.5	6.7

[1] This includes HSDU staff, National Trainers, Development Officers and some staff of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state for each local enterprise company in Scotland the *(a)* names, *(b)* dates of appointment and *(c)* party affiliations of the non-executive directors who have (i) been appointed since 1 May 1997 and (ii) resigned since 1 May 1997. [37795]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* Local Enterprise Companies are private companies that contract with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. No information is held on the party affiliations of non-executive directors of local enterprise companies. The other information requested is set out in the table.

	Non-executive directors resigning since 1 May 1997			*Non-executive directors appointed since 1 May 1997*	
	Name	*Date appointed*	*Date resigned*	*Name*	*Date appointed*
Local Enterprise Company in Scottish Enterprise area					
Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise	John Jameson OBE	22 March 1991	31 December 1997	Andrew Campbell OBE	1 January 1998
				Michael Keggins	1 January 1998
				Nicholas A. G. Waugh	1 January 1998
Dunbartonshire Enterprise	David Kilmurry	19 May 1993	25 June 1997		
Enterprise Ayrshire	Brigadier Tony Ricketts	2 April 1991	10 December 1997	Jim Ferguson	6 January 1998
				Bill Kerr	6 January 1998
Fife Enterprise	Margaret A. Russell	10 May 1993	8 December 1997		
Forth Valley Enterprise				Jim Devine	4 November 1997
Glasgow Development Agency	Cllr. Robert Gould	21 October 1996	16 January 1998	Cllr. Frank McAveety	23 February 1998
	Ian J. Irvine	1 April 1991	29 June 1997	Prof. Alan Richardson	31 October 1997
	Prof. Robert B. Jack CBE	27 November 1992	29 June 1997	Alan Sinclair	31 October 1997
				John Q. Thorburn	31 October 1997
Grampian Enterprise	Ray Dinsdale	26 April 1993	12 January 1998	Martin Gilbert	12 January 1998
	Andrew Salveson	27 February 1995	12 January 1998	Lesley Bale	12 January 1998

	Non-executive directors resigning since 1 May 1997			Non-executive directors appointed since 1 May 1997	
	Name	*Date appointed*	*Date resigned*	*Name*	*Date appointed*
Lanarkshire Development Agency	—	—	—	—	—
Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd.	George Borthwick CBE	5 October 1994	4 June 1997	Ronald Dunn	4 June 1997
	Cllr. Keith Geddes	1 August 1990	29 January 1998	Eileen Mackay	20 February 1998
	Prof. Sir Stewart Sutherland	6 April 1996	11 February 1998		
Moray Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise[1]	Ewan Buchanan	16 September 1996	28 February 1998		
Renfrewshire Enterprise	—	—	—	—	—
Scottish Borders Enterprise	Alistair Bennett	30 July 1990	7 August 1997		
	Andrew Thatcher	14 December 1995	1 July 1997		
Scottish Enterprise Tayside	Allan L. Proctor	13 September 1990	3 September 1997	Ian McMillan	3 September 1997
	David Sawyer	1 June 1994	3 September 1997	John A. Robertson	16 October 1997
	William Sutherland MBE	13 December 1990	3 September 1997		
Local Enterprise Companies in Highlands and Islands Enterprise area					
Argyll and the Islands Enterprise	Norman Lamond	1 April 1991	16 July 1997	Robert Alexander	16 July 1997
	Malcolm Moy	1 April 1991	16 July 1997		
Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise	—	—	—	—	—
Inverness and Nairn Enterprise	Ann Fraser	25 October 1994	29 July 1997	Ian Urquhart	27 January 1998
				Grant Sword	27 January 1998
Lochaber Limited	Brian Donald	1 April 1991	15 December 1997	Kurt Larson	28 August 1997
	Michael Leonard	27 June 1996	15 December 1997	David Wright	
	Stewart MacLean	1 April 1991	29 May 1997	Laurence Young	
	Catrionna MacMillan	30 January 1992	15 December 1997		
Orkney Enterprise	—	—	—	—	—
Ross and Cromarty Enterprise	Ian G. Palmer	25 October 1994	6 November 1997	Maggie Symonds	10 December 1997
Shetland Enterprise	George Sutherland	1 April 1991	1 June 1997	David Nicholson	1 June 1997
Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise	Morag Craig	1 April 1991	24 February 1998	Muriel Jones	1 April 1998
	Ronald Johnstone	1 April 1991	25 June 1997	Donald MacDonald	1 April 1998
	Una MacPherson	16 May 1994	29 October 1997	Iain MacKinnon	1 April 1998
Western Isles Enterprise	David Buckland	11 March 1996	31 March 1998		
	Roderick MacAskill	10 March 1997	20 March 1998		
	George V. MacLeod	1 April 1991	6 January 1998		
	Peter Morrison	1 April 1991	16 February 1998		

[1] Moray Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise contract to both Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the costs of *(a)* anti-drugs education initiatives and *(b)* other drugs reduction initiatives in each of the past 14 years; and what are the expected costs of similar campaigns in each of the next five years. [38358]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 8 April 1998]:* Information on expenditure on anti-drugs education and other drug reduction initiatives since 1983 is not held centrally. The expected costs of similar campaigns to 2003 will depend upon plans for tackling drug misuse in future years.

Overgrazing

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy on the grazing of moorlands by domestic livestock. [38566]

Mr. Macdonald: The Government's policy is to limit damage to moorlands from any overgrazing by livestock which attract headage payments. Our agri-environment schemes provide for enhancement of the moorland environment by a range of measures including stock removal where appropriate.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of potential overgrazing of heath and heather vegetation in the LFA were investigated by the Agriculture Department in each of the last three years; and how many of these investigations resulted in the withholding of *(a)* some and *(b)* all of the livestock headage payments made to the farmers involved. [38560]

Mr. Macdonald: Twelve cases of alleged overgrazing have been investigated in the last three years. Most of these have been resolved by agreement with the producer. There have been no instances so far where it has been necessary to restrict livestock headage payments.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the environmental conditions attached to the receipt of livestock headage payments

made through *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowances, *(b)* sheep annual premiums, *(c)* suckler cow premiums and *(d)* beef special premiums to prevent overgrazing. [38561]

Mr. Macdonald: Subsidy payments under these schemes are conditional on the stock being managed so as to prevent damage through overgrazing and semi-natural vegetation.

Hedgerows

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to protect hedgerows. [38569]

Mr. Macdonald: The importance of hedgerows is widely recognised not only in natural heritage terms, but also for farming, cultural and archaeological reasons. Incentives are available to encourage farmers and crofters to maintain their existing hedges and to plant new hedges through both the Government's agri-environment programme and Scottish Natural Heritage grants

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children have been excluded from school in each academic year since 1990–91. [39176]

Mr. Wilson: Information on exclusions from school was not collected centrally before 1994–95. The most recent available information, as set out in the yearly report on Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools published by the Audit Unit of HM Inspectors of Schools, is in the table.

	Number of pupils permanently excluded[1]		*Number of half days of temporary exclusions*	
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1994–95	47	296	[2]20,115	[2]157,958
1995–96	30	155	31,207	279,636
1996–97	16	91	36,433	276,979

[1] Some authorities show a total of zero for permanent exclusions, either because as a matter of policy they do not permit permanent exclusions or because they do not record permanent exclusions separately.

[2] For 1994–95, data on temporary exclusions are available only for January–July 1995.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list Scottish Development Agency-funded environmental improvement projects in each Scottish constituency. [39175]

Mr. Wilson: Detailed information on the programme of environmental improvements funded by the Scottish Development Agency is no longer available. The Agency's successor, the Scottish Enterprise network, has funded up to 400 separate environmental improvements each year since 1991. Information on the Scottish Enterprise environmental improvement programme in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

School Sport

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to improve facilities for sport in schools. [39173]

Mr. Galbraith: The provision of facilities for sport in schools is a matter for local authorities. The Government have, however, recently announced tighter planning controls on the use of playing fields for development to ensure that wherever possible sports facilities are retained for use by the local school and community. In addition the Scottish Sports Council has allocated over £3.5 million through the National Lottery to sports projects in schools.

Physical Education Teachers

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many physical education teachers were employed by local education authorities in each year since 1979. [39174]

Mr. Wilson: The available information for years in which the data were collected is set out in the table:

Number (full-time equivalent) of physical education teachers in Scottish education authority secondary schools

Year (at September)	*Number*
1979	2,008
1980	1,998
1981	1,934
1982	1,896
1983	[1]1,862
1984	[1]1,792
1987	1,698
1988	1,614
1990	1,618
1992	1,618
1994	1,672

[1] estimated

No information has been collected since 1994 as the situation was thought to have remained fairly stable and it was not considered desirable to burden teachers with a data collection. The next return from teachers will be in September 1998.

DEFENCE

Northern Ireland

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* names of individual members of the armed forces killed while serving in Northern Ireland since 1982. [38405]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is set out in the table.

Year/name	*Total*
1982	28
Pte. S. A. Carleton	
Rfn. D. R. Holland	
Rfn. M. A. Rapley	
Rfn. P. N. Malakos	
Sgt. M. D. Burridge	
Cpl. M. Ward	
Lt. J. L. Hamilton	

Year/name	Total
Pte. C. P. Clifford	
Pte. T. Anderson	
Pte. H. A. Cummings	
Lbdr. K. M. Waller	
Pte. M. K. Jessop	
Cpl. L. A. Bush	
L. Cpl. F. A. Williamson	
Sgt. T. G. Cochrane	
Cpl. C. H. Spence	
Cpl. D. P. Salthouse	
Pte. S. G. Smith	
LCpl. P. McDonagh	
LCpl. S. Bagshaw	
Pte. C. J. Collins	
Pte. P. J. Delaney	
Pte. T. M. Adam	
LCpl. D. W. Stitt	
Pte. S. A. Williamson	
Pte. N. Williams	
Pte. D. Murray	
Cpl. A. Smith	
1983	15
LCpl. C. W. McNeill	
Cpl. G. T. Jeffrey	
Pte. R. Biddell	
Pte. A. F. Stinson	
Pte. G. M. Curtis	
Cpl. T. Harron	
Pte. O. Neely	
Pte. J. Roxborough	
Pte. R. R. Alexander	
Cpl. R. D. Finlay	
Pte. A. Stock	
Pte. T. C. Campbell	
LCpl. S. W. Taverner	
Maj R. F. C. Armstrong	
LCpl. B. V. McKeown	
1984	19
Pte. R. G. Elliott	
Pte. L. C. Houston	
Sgt. P. D. Oram	
LCpl. T. A. Loughlin	
Pte. S. D. Montgomery	
Sgt. D. Ross	
Pte. N. Clarke	
Pte. N. J. Johnston	
CSgt. I. E. Hillen	
Cpl. T. H. Agar	
LCpl. R. V. Huggens	
LCpl. S. Anderson	
Pte. D. Chambers	
Pte. N. J. McKinley	
W/Cpl. H. C. J. Kerrigan	
Pte. R. D. Bennett	
LCpl. P. W. Gallimore	
Gnr. T. P. Utteridge	
LCpl. A. I. Slater	
1985	6
Pte. J. A. Graham	
Pte. T. W. Harkness	
LCpl. A. Dacre	
Pte. M. R. Patten	
Sgt. R. F. Boyd	
Capt. G. Hanna	
1986	12
Pte. W. V. Foster	
Pte. J. F. Early	
Rfn. D. A. Mulley	
Pte. T. J. Irwin	
Pte. I. W. C. Pollock	

Year/name	Total
Maj. A. F. French	
Cpl. D. B. Brown	
Pte. R. W. Hill	
Pte. C. D. Davies	
Pte. M. R. Bertram	
Sgt. D. D. M. Taggart	
Pte. M. A. J. Blaney	
1987	11
Maj. G. Shaw	
Pte. I. J. O'Connor	
Cpl. T. J. Oldman	
Pte. W. T. Graham	
Capt. I. R. K. Anderson	
Pte. J. A. Leach	
Pte. J. J. McIlwaine	
Pte. G. J. Tracey	
LCpl. T. Hewitt	
Pte. W. R. Megrath	
Pte. S. W. Megrath	
1988	33
Capt. T. D. Armstrong	
Pte. W. J. Stewart	
LCpl. A. T. Johnston	
Pte. J. Cummings	
Pte. F. Starrett	
Cpl. D. T. Wood	
Cpl. D. R. Howes	
Cpl. W. T. Burleigh	
Gnr. L. Morgan	
Pte. E. Gibson	
Cpl. P. D. Hayes	
LCpl. M. Darcy	
LCpl. W. J. Patterson	
LCpl. D. W. Green	
LCpl. G. P. Lambie	
Cpl. I. Metcalfe	
Sgt. M. J. Winkler	
Sig. M. R. Clavey	
WO2. R. J. Howard	
Sgt. M. B. Matthews	
LCpl. R. W. Butler	
Pte. R. A. McNicholl	
Cpl. A. S. Bannister	
Pte. B. E. M. Bishop	
Pte. J. Burfitt	
Pte. R. Greener	
Pte. A. S. Lewis	
Pte. M. A. Norsworthy	
Pte. S. J. Wilkinson	
Pte. J. S. Winter	
Pte. P. L. Bullock	
Pte. S. McKinney	
Pte. W. J. Moreland	
1989	14
Pte. N. D. Peacock	
LCpl. N. J. Duncan	
LBdr. S. G. Cummings	
Gnr. M. D. Amos	
Pte. T. J. Hardy	
Cpl. S. R. McGonigle	
Mne. A. Gilbert	
SSgt. K. A. Frogett	
LCpl. S. D. Halligan	
Pte. M. E. Marshall	
Pte. D. C. MacAulay	
LCpl. S. P. Wilson	
LCpl. M. J. Patterson	
Pte. J. Houston	

Year/name	Total
1990	15
Pte. O. F. Kilpatrick	
Sgt. T. A. Jameson	
LCpl. J. Bradley	
Pte. M. D. Adams	
Pte. S. S. Smart	
Pte. J. Burch	
LSgt. G. A. Stewart	
Pte. C. J. McCullough	
LCpl. S. Burrows	
Kgn. D. A. Sweeney	
Kgn. P. D. Worrall	
Kgn. S. R. Beacham	
Kgn. V. J. P. Scott	
Rgr. C. J. Smith	
WO2 A. D. Cooper	
1991	13
Pte. R. J. Love	
Pte. P. D. Sutcliffe	
Cpl. O'Neill	
Pte. Blakely	
LCpl. Crozier	
Pte. Hamilton	
Pte. B. Lawrence	
Pte. A. Harrison	
LCpl. S. R. D. Ware	
WO2 Cross	
Dvr. Pantry	
Pte. Boxall	
LCpl. Newell	
1992	6
Fus. A. J. Grundy	
Gdsm. Shackleton	
Pte. P. Turner	
Sgt. R. J. Irvine	
LCpl. I. Warnock	
Rgr. S. Waller	
1993	8
LCpl. Beswick	
LCpl. M. Johnston	
LCpl. L. Dickson	
Pte. C. Wren	
Pte. J. Randell	
LCpl. K. J. Pullin	
LBdr. P. A. Garrett	
Gdsm. D. N. Blinco	
1994	3
LCpl. D. Wilson	
Pte. R. McCollum	
Cpl. T. Withers	
1995	0
1996	1
WO1(ASM) J. O. Bradwell	
1997	1
Lbdr. S. Restorick	
1998	0
Total	185

Anthrax

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantity of *(a)* anthrax and *(b)* precursors for the production of anthrax is stored (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) at United Kingdom bases abroad; and at how many locations in total UK-owned anthrax is stored. [38073]

Dr. Reid: The United Kingdom has no offensive chemical or biological warfare capability. The United Kingdom is a State Party to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and holds no bulk stocks of agents such as *Bacillus anthracis* (*B. anthracis*) which causes the disease anthrax either in the United Kingdom or abroad.

The Ministry of Defence does fund research with anthrax bacteria as part of its programme to provide effective protection to United Kingdom service personnel should chemical or biological agents be used against them. Such research is conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Defence at the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector (CBD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency at Porton Down or is sub-contracted by them to the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research, which is part of the Department of Health. Both organisations hold only seed stocks of *B. anthracis*. These are grown in culture when required. Excess material is routinely killed after experiments are completed. *B. anthracis* can be cultured under a wide variety of conditions and using media typically held in public or private sector microbiology laboratories. CBD Sector does not routinely use specialist media or precursors.

Small outbreaks of animal anthrax occur annually in the UK and, very rarely, human cases also occur. There is, therefore, a need to maintain a diagnostic service and to conduct periodic testing to ensure the efficacy of the vaccine. In this context, a small number of centres in the health service hold strains of *B. anthracis* for public health purposes.

All laboratories working with *B. anthracis* have to meet strict health and safety requirements and must be licensed under the Specified Animal Pathogens Order 1998 which lays down strict containment conditions. Nine premises are currently licensed.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the (i) effect on mortality and (ii) incidence of cancer of exposure to nuclear tests according to the degree and extent of exposure to radiation. [38581]

Mr. Spellar: As I told the House on 4 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 1010, nuclear test veterans have been the subject of two detailed studies by the National Radiological Protection Board, the first in 1988 and the second in 1993. The 1993 report concluded that participation in the test programme had not had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases.

Salisbury Plain

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what complaints he has received about the conduct of the Ministry of Defence police concerning their enforcement of the Salisbury Plain byelaws on Saturday 4 April. [38649]

Dr. Reid: None, although I understand the Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police has received correspondence about the Royal Artillery Hunt.

Mustard Gas

Mrs. Fiona Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken to investigate the extent of pollution from mustard gas disposal at Spalford Woods, Nottinghamshire. [39150]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Army Standards

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Adjutant General's revised paper on army standards and discipline; and if he will make a statement. [38570]

Dr. Reid: The Army is currently undertaking work on its standards and discipline policy with the aim of revising and bringing up to date its current Standards and Discipline paper, issued in October 1993. When the work is completed, I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many surveys have been conducted into the contamination of, and pollution from, the former chemical warfare filling and storage site at Barnham Heath in Suffolk since 1980; [38599]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *428*, if he will list the titles of each survey at RAF Norton Disney and Riseley, indicating the dates on which each survey was completed, the agency which conducted each survey; and the current security classifications of each survey. [38598]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Records

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will open for public inspection file classmark WO32/20163 held at the Public Record Office. [38607]

Mr. Spellar: WO32/20163 is open. It was transferred to the Public Record Office on 11 July 1997.

WE177 Bombs

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many WE177 bombs have so far been dismantled. [38961]

Dr. Reid: 86 per cent. of our WE177 warheads have now been dismantled.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types of vehicle were used to transport the WE177 bomb. [38960]

Dr. Reid: The following types of vehicle have been used to transport the WE177 which was withdrawn from service on 31 March 1998.

Truck Cargo 4t 4x4 Bedford MK

Truck Cargo Heavy Duty Mk I

Truck Cargo Heavy Duty Mk II

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when training for RAF pilots with the WE177 bomb was ended. [38959]

Dr. Reid: The last formal course for RAF aircrew took place in April 1997. This was supplemented by simulator continuation training in procedures on unit to maintain aircrew currency through to March 1998. The WE177 bomb was withdrawn from service on 31 March 1998.

Admiralty and Army Boards

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the *(a)* Admiralty Board and *(b)* Army Board has met since 1 August 1997. [38993]

Dr. Reid: Neither the Admiralty Board nor the Army Board have met since 1 August 1997.

The Admiralty Board last met on 2 July 1997 and will next meet on 1 July 1998.

The Army Board last met on 18 June 1997 and will next meet on 24 July 1998.

HMS Dreadnought

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *562*, if HMS Dreadnought's radiation dose levels were recorded prior to or after the defuelling process. [38847]

Mr. Spellar: The radiation dose figure given in my answer of 26 November referred to the aggregate radiation dose received by all persons who worked on HMS Dreadnought from 1982 to 1983. This was obtained from measurements of individual doses made throughout the duration of the decommissioning project, which included the defuelling process.

Radiation dose rates on board HMS Dreadnought were measured both before and after the defuelling process. As expected, there was little reduction in the general radiation level following the defuel as the reactor fuel is always heavily shielded.

Staff Newsletters

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current security classifications of the newsletters produced for the staff of *(a)* the Army Technical Support Agency, *(b)* the Defence Transport and Movements Executive and *(c)* the Defence Medical Training Organisation; how often each newsletter is produced; and when each newsletter was first produced. [38986]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executives of the Agencies concerned. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. D. Ball to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 20 April 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the staff newsletter of the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA) as this matter falls within my responsibility as the Agency Chief Executive.

The ATSA Newsletter carries no security classification. It contains "Unclassified" material. The Newsletter is published quarterly. The first edition was issued coincidentally with the launch of the Agency in Autumn 1995, although earlier newsheets on the progress towards Agency formation were issued to affected staff prior to launch.

Letter from C. G. Callow to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 20 April 1998:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Defence Medical Training Organisation newsletter as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of that Agency.

Our newsletter is unclassified and we produce it as and when we consider necessary which has been twice a year. The first newsletter was produced in July 1996.

Letter from R. E. Ratazzi to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 20 April 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the security classification and frequency of newsletters produced for the staff of Ministry of Defence Agencies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency.

The newsletter produced within my Agency is unclassified, intended purely for internal circulation and, dependent on material for inclusion, is issued on a monthly basis. It was originally entitled "DTMX Developments" and ran from July 1995 until November 1996, when it was renamed "DTMX press". It has continued to be distributed to all staff since then.

Aircraft Crashes

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Royal Air Force Board of Inquiry found was the cause of each of the aircraft crashes *(a)* 13 April 1989—Jaguar, *(b)* 13 November 1990—Jaguar, *(c)* 18 March 1991—Canberra, *(d)* 27 May 1993—Hercules, *(e)* 26 August 1993—Chipmunk, *(f)* 1 September 1994—Tornado and *(g)* 1 June 1995—Harrier, if black boxes were fitted; and in each case if higher authority concluded that negligence had occurred. [38984]

Mr. Spellar: Details of the accidents mentioned are contained in the appropriate Military Aircraft Accident Summaries, copies of which are kept in the Library of the House. A brief summary of the cases is as follows:

Accident	*Cause*	*Accident Data Recorder (Y/N)*	*Negligence (Y/N)*
13 April 1989—Jaguar	Not positively determined	N	N
13 November 1990—Jaguar	Natural operating risks	N	N
18 March 1991—Canberra	Aircrew error	N	N
27 May 1993—Hercules	Not positively determined	N	N
26 August 1993—Chipmunk	Human factors (aircrew)	N	N
1 September 1994—Tornado	Not positively determined	Y	N
1 June 1995—Harrier	Human factors (aircrew)	Y	N

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Health

Mr. Cranston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to place research on animal health and welfare on the basis of a requirements document, similar to that for food research; and if he will make a statement. [39195]

Mr. Rooker: We are today publishing a Document setting out our future animal health and welfare research requirements, and inviting tenders for research work to be financed in the year starting on 1 April 1999, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. This document focuses particularly on animal welfare, organisms capable of causing food poisoning, and bovine tuberculosis. Further documents setting out animal health and welfare research requirements will be published in future years.

This is a broad programme. One of the key elements builds on our current work to improve our understanding of how *E. coli* behaves on farms, and to identify the critical control points for risk management. This will complement work being financed by other Departments.

The Document also takes forward the recommendations in the Krebs Report that our research effort into bovine tuberculosis should be refocused along two main approaches: understanding the causes of outbreaks, and developing improved strategies to reduce the number of outbreaks. The Ministry's research programmes generally operate on a rolling three-year cycle, so for most of the programmes the Document covers only approximately one third of the total research effort. For bovine tuberculosis, however, the whole programme has been reviewed in the light of the recommendations in the Krebs Report. The new TB programme picks up the individual recommendations the Report makes for research and lays the foundation for developing soundly based control strategies in the future, including in the longer term the development of a cattle vaccine.

The Document also makes a significant movement in the direction of allocating research contracts by open competition, which will help to ensure that work is undertaken by those best qualified to do it. This also responds to another of the Krebs recommendations, and must be right if we are to achieve value for money in this area.

Ministerial Meetings and Visits

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list for 2 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended;

which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35004]

(2) if he will list for 3 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35007]

(3) if he will list for 5 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35005]

(4) if he will list for 6 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35006]

(5) if he will list for 7 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35010]

(6) if he will list for 8 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35009]

(7) if he will list for 9 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35008]

(8) if he will list for 10 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35014]

(9) if he will list for 12 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35013]

(10) if he will list for 13 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35012]

(11) if he will list for 14 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35011]

(12) if he will list for 15 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35017]

(13) if he will list for 16 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35016]

(14) if he will list for 17 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35015]

(15) if he will list for 19 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35020]

(16) if he will list for 20 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35019]

(17) if he will list for 21 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35018]

(18) if he will list for 22 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35021]

(19) if he will list for 23 May 1997 *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers. [35022]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answers 17 March 1998]:* Set out are relevant details from my diary and those of my Ministerial team for the days requested.

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE
(Dr. Jack Cunningham)
1 May 1997 to 31 May 1997
Monday 12 May 1997
10.30 Bilateral with Commissioner Fischler, Brussels
13.00 Lunch with Commissioner Kinnock, Brussels
18.30 Meeting with Dutch Agriculture Minister, The Hague
Tuesday 13 May 1997
15.00 Meeting with British Retail Consortium
Tuesday 20 May 1997
Agriculture Council, Brussels
Wednesday 21 May 1997
Agriculture Council, Brussels
11.45 Meeting with MEPs, Brussels
12.15 Meeting with MEPs, Brussels
13.00 Lunch with MEPs, Brussels
15.00 Meeting with Dagmar Roth-Behrendt MEP, Brussels
15.45 Meeting with Reimer Böge MEP, Brussels
16.15 Meeting with Colino Salamanca MEP, Brussels
Sunday 25 May 1997
12.30 Informal Agriculture Council, Domberg, Netherlands
Monday 26 May 1997
Informal Agricultural Council, Domberg, Netherlands
Tuesday 27 May 1997
Informal Agriculture Council, Domberg, Netherlands
Wednesday 28 May 1997
19.30 Dinner with Leaders of the Food Industry

MINISTER OF STATE
(Mr. Rooker)
1 May 1997 to 31 May 1997
Wednesday 7 May 1997
16.00 Ministers Meeting with Food and Drink Federation
16.30 Meeting with Jim Nicholson MEP, Dr. Ian Paisley, John Hume
17.30 Meeting with Consumers Association
Thursday 8 May 1997
17.30 Meeting with NFU President
Monday 19 May 1997
17.45 Meeting with Chairman of MLC
Tuesday 20 May 1997
10.30 Meeting with MHS Industry Forum: Speech and Q&A
Thursday 22 May 1997
14.00 Meeting with Hilton Dawson MP and IBEA officials

MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND THE COUNTRYSIDE
(Mr. Morley)
1 May 1997 to 31 May 1997
Thursday 8 May 1997
17.00 Meeting with Forestry Commission
Monday 12 May 1997
15.00 Meeting with CLA President
Tuesday 13 May 1997
15.00 Meeting with Bob Blizzard MP
16.00 Meeting with RSPCA, CIWF, PAL
Thursday 15 May 1997
09.30 Meeting with Consumers' representatives
10.00 Meeting with Carla Lane
11.30 Meeting with National Animal Health and Welfare Panel
Thursday 15 May 1997
12.30 Meeting with Commissioner Kinnock: Fisheries
12.45 Meeting with Chief Executive: RSPB
14.00 Meeting with NFU representatives
15.45 Meeting with Spotlight
Monday 19 May 1997
12.00 Meeting with DoE, Water Summit
Tuesday 20 May 1997
11.00 Meeting with Commissioner Kinnock
12.15 Meeting with Commissioner Bonino
15.00 Meeting with Medina Ortega MEP
16.00 Meeting with Mr. Cavaco, DGXIV
Wednesday 21 May 1997
16.30 Meeting with Michael Foster MP

MINISTER FOR FARMING AND THE FOOD INDUSTRY
(Lord Donoughue)
1 May 1997 to 31 May 1997
Wednesday 7 May 1997
16.00 Meeting with Food and Drink Federation
Thursday 8 May 1997
12.30 Annual Awards of Excellence, Academie Culinaire de France
17.00 Introductions, President, NFU
Tuesday 13 May 1997
15.00 Meeting with British Retail Consortium
Thursday 15 May 1997
15.00 Courtesy call, Jamaican Minister for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade
Monday 19 May 1997
17.00 Meeting: Meat and Livestock Commission
Wednesday 21 May 1997
12.30 Agri-money presentation, Sir David Naish, Sean Roberts, Ian Gardiner, NFU

Friday 30 May 1997

11.45 Courtesy call, Dr. Richard Grant, NZ High Commissioner and Dr. Lockwood Smith, NZ Minister of Agriculture

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list for 2 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35268]

(2) if he will list for 3 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35267]

(3) if he will list for 5 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35266]

(4) if he will list for 6 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35265]

(5) if he will list for 7 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35264]

(6) if he will list for 9 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35262]

(7) if he will list for 10 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35261]

(8) if he will list for 12 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35260]

(9) if he will list for 13 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35259]

(10) if he will list for 14 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35258]

(11) if he will list for 15 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35257]

(12) if he will list for 16 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35256]

(13) if he will list for 17 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35255]

(14) if he will list for 19 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35254]

(15) if he will list for 20 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35253]

(16) if he will list for 21 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35252]

(17) if he will list for 22 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35251]

(18) if he will list for 23 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35250]

(19) if he will list for 24 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35249]

(20) if he will list for 26 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35248]

(21) if he will list for 27 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35247]

(22) if he will list for 28 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35246]

(23) if he will list for 29 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35245]

(24) if he will list for 30 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35244]

(25) if he will list for 31 January *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers. [35243]

Dr. John Cunningham: Set out are relevant details from my diary and those of my Ministerial team for the days requested.

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

(Dr. Jack Cunningham)

1 January 1998 to 31 January 1998

Tuesday 6 January 1998

09.20 Oxford Farming Conference (Speech)

Wednesday 7 January 1998

10.00 Meeting with Japanese Agriculture Minister

11.00 Interview with Mr. Keith Seacroft (Durham First)

16.00 Meeting with Brussels Press Corps

Thursday 8 January 1998

11.00 Meeting: Plenary with the Commission, Lancaster House

11.30 Meeting with Commissioner Fischler

14.00 Meeting with Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan

14.45 Meeting with Commission Bonino

Sunday 11 January 1998

09.00 Tour of Windward Islands Banana production, St. Lucia

Monday 12 January 1998

10.00 Meeting with Windward Islands PMs, St. Lucia

12.30 Lunch hosted by PM of St. Lucia, St. Lucia

Wednesday 14 January 1998

10.45 Assured British Meat Launch (Speech)

15.30 FSA White Paper Launch Statement, HoC

16.30 Press Briefing on FSA White Paper

Monday 19 January 1998

15.30 Meeting with Finnish Agriculture Minister, Brussels

17.00 Meeting with Council Secretariat and Commission, Brussels

Tuesday 20 January 1998

10.30 Agriculture Council, Brussels

Press Conference, Brussels

Wednesday 21 January 1998

11.00 Meeting with Consumer Panel

16.30 Oral Evidence to Agriculture Select Committee

Monday 26 January 1998

13.00 Meeting with Agricultural Advisory Group

16.00 Meeting with German Ambassador (HE Herr Gebhart von Moltke)

19.30 Dinner with the Royal Veterinary College

Tuesday 27 January 1998

09.30 Meeting with NFU President

16.00 Meeting with Mr. Leif Mills

Wednesday 28 January 1998

10.15 Meeting with Australian Foreign Affairs Minister

MINISTER OF STATE

(Mr. Rooker)

1 January 1998 to 31 January 1998

Tuesday 13 January 1998

10.15 Meeting with ACMSF

11.30 Meeting with Norwich MPs

Wednesday 14 January 1998

16.30 Press Briefing: White Paper Launch

Thursday 15 January 1998

10.00 Meeting with Tessa Jowell: Meeting FSA staff—White Paper

17.00 Meeting with David Minge, US House of Representatives

Friday 16 January 1998

09.00 Company Visit with Cadbury-Schweppes

BCCCA: Cocoa and Chocolate Proposal

Wednesday 21 January 1998

11.00 Meeting with Consumer Panel

12.45 Lunch with Consumer Panel

Monday 26 January 1998

08.00 Visit to CSL, IFR and John Innes—Norwich

Tuesday 27 January 1998

14.00 Meeting with Sheila McKechnie and Sue Davies of Consumers Association: SEAC

Wednesday 28 January 1998

Meeting with MHS, York

12.40 Animal Health Distributors Association, Harrogate (Speech)

Thursday 29 January 1998

09.30 Announcement on HAS scores

MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

(Mr. Morley)

1 January 1998 to 31 January 1998

Wednesday 7 January 1998

19.00 Meeting with Lancashire Agricultural Discussion Society

Thursday 8 January 1998

14.45 Meeting with Commission Bonino, Lancaster House

Friday 9 January 1998

12.00 Meal with Yorkshire West Riding NFU: AGM and Lunch

Wednesday 14 January 1998

12.30 Meeting with Nigel Atkins: Fisheries Production Organisation Board

18.45 Meal with National Sheep Association

Thursday 15 January 1998

Meeting with Intergroup MEPs, Strasbourg

Monday 19 January 1998

15.30 Meeting with Carla Lane, Penny Lewis, Bill Jordan: Animal Welfare Issues

Tuesday 20 January 1998

Farm Visit, Nottinghamshire

Wednesday 21 January 1998

10.00 Meeting with Forestry Commission

Friday 23 January 1998

Easton College AGM, Norwich (Speech)

Monday 26 January 1998

11.40 Farm Visit with Lord Melchett, Norfolk

Tuesday 27 January 1998

09.33 Farm Visit with Mr. Hinchliffe, Wakefield

13.45 Visit to Abattoir, Colne

Wednesday 28 January 1998

10.00 Meeting with Alex Salmond MP: Fisheries

11.00 Meeting with Fiona Reynolds and Tony Burton, CPRE

14.00 Meeting with Mike Townsend, NFFO: Drift Nets

Thursday 29 January 1998

11.00 Meeting with James Paice and Ed Varley: Mink Keeping Order

13.00 Lunch with Barclays Bank: Agriculture Issues

MINISTER FOR FARMING AND THE FOOD INDUSTRY

(Lord Donoughue)

1 January 1998 to 31 January 1998

Wednesday 7 January 1998

20.00 Dinner with Consumer Representatives, South West Region

Thursday 8 January 1998

Regional Visit: South West

Tuesday 13 January 1998

10.30 Meeting with Minister from Costa Rica

Wednesday 14 January 1998

10.30 Assured British Meat Launch

Friday 16 January 1998

12.30 Lunch with Institute of Agricultural Management (Speech)

Tuesday 20 January 1998

15.00 Agriculture Council, Brussels

Monday 26 January 1998

13.00 Meeting with Agriculture Advisory Group

16.30 Meeting with NIAB

Tuesday 27 January 1998

11.00 Meeting with Mr. Sadayuki Hayashi: Speciality Foods

Wednesday 28 January 1998

18.00 Hosting Sugar ManCom Reception, Admiralty House

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list for 2 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35673]

(2) if he will list for 3 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35674]

(3) if he will list for 4 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals

had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35675]

(4) if he will list for 5 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35676]

(5) if he will list for 6 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35677]

(6) if he will list for 7 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35678]

(7) if he will list for 9 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35679]

(8) if he will list for 10 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35680]

(9) if he will list for 11 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35681]

(10) if he will list for 12 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35682]

(11) if he will list for 13 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35683]

(12) if he will list for 14 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35684]

(13) if he will list for 16 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35685]

(14) if he will list for 17 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35672]

(15) if he will list for 18 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35671]

(16) if he will list for 19 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35670]

(17) if he will list for 20 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35669]

(18) if he will list for 21 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers;
[35668]

(19) if he will list for 23 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35667]

(20) if he will list for 24 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35666]

(21) if he will list for 25 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35665]

(22) if he will list for 26 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35664]

(23) if he will list for 27 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers; [35663]

(24) if he will list for 28 February *(a)* which organisations he met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended and which individuals had meetings with Ministers and officials; and if he will provide this information for each of his Ministers. [35662]

Dr. John Cunningham: Set out are relevant details from my diary and those of my Ministerial team for the days requested.

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

(Dr. Jack Cunningham)

1 February 1998 to 28 February 1998

Tuesday 3 February 1998

10.00 Meeting with European Parliament Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, Brussels

15.00 Meeting with European Parliament Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection Committee, Brussels

Wednesday 4 February 1998

10.15 NFU AGM (Speech)

Hilton Hotel, Park Lane, W1

Thursday 5 February 1998

14.30 Meeting with Leader of the French Socialists

Monday 9 February 1998

19.30 Dinner with Agricultural Reform Group

Tuesday 10 February 1998

09.00 Meeting with NFU President

12.00 Meeting with Forestry Commission

17.00 Meeting with Elwyn Clwyd MP and Plaid Cymru MPs

Wednesday 11 February 1998

12.00 Meeting with Country Landowners Association

19.45 "The Grocer" Conference: Creation of the Food Standards Agency (Speech)

Monday 16 February 1998

11.30 Pre-Council Briefing with Commissioner Fischler, Brussels

15.00 Agriculture Council, Brussels

Tuesday 17 February 1998

Agriculture Council, Brussels

Wednesday 18 February 1998

10.00 Meeting with Consumer Organisations

12.00 British Beef Week Launch, HoC

16.00 Meeting with John Winter

Thursday 19 February 1998

09.45 Seminar in Support of Mission to China (Speech)

16.30 Meeting with Prime Minister and Farming Unions

Monday 23 February 1998

13.00 Meeting with Agricultural Advisory Group

17.00 Meeting: COPA (European Farmers)

Tuesday 24 February 1998

18.00 Meeting with CLA (European Landowners)

Wednesday 25 February 1998

10.00 Agra-Europe Conference (Speech)

13.00 Lunch with St. Lucian Agriculture Minister

Friday 27 February 1998

09.45 Food Safety Conference, Cumbria TEC (Speech)

MINISTER OF STATE

(Mr. Rooker)

1 February 1998 to 28 February 1998

Tuesday 3 February 1998

10.00 NFU AGM

19.00 NFU Annual Dinner

Thursday 5 February 1998

14.00 Meeting with MPs: Eartagging

Monday 9 February 1998

09.00 Regional Visit to Northern Region

16.00 Meeting with FDF: FSA White Paper

Wednesday 11 February 1998

13.00 Speaking Engagement with BOCM Paul: Award Ceremony for National Forage and Premier Breeders Competition

Monday 16 February 1998

16.00 Meeting with Professor Tim Lang: Food Standards Agency

Tuesday 17 February 1998

Regional Visit to North Mercia RSC

Wednesday 18 February 1998

10.00 Meeting with UK Consumer Groups

Thursday 19 February 1998

11.00 Meeting with MPs: Cattle Traceability

16.30 Meetings with MPs: Knackers Yards

Friday 20 February 1998

08.00 Regional Visit to South Mercia RSC

Monday 23 February 1998

09.00 Company Visit with MLC, Milton Keynes

16.30 Meeting with NFU representatives: Visit by COPA Officeholders

Wednesday 25 February 1998

10.30 Speaking Engagement with IPMS and MSF: Seminar on food safety and standards

13.00 Meeting with MPs: TB/Krebs

14.00 Meeting with Ben Bradshaw MP: Pesticides Bill

Thursday 26 February 1998

10.45 Regional Visit, PSD, York

12.30 Visit to Central Science Laboratories, Sand Hutton, York

MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

(Mr. Morley)

1 February 1998 to 28 February 1989

Monday 2 February 1998

19.00 Dinner with Paddy Tipping MP, East Midlands NFU

Tuesday 3 February 1998

15.00 Meeting with European Parliament Fisheries Committee: UK Presidency

Wednesday 4 February 1998

09.00 Meeting with Canadian Fisheries Minister

Thursday 5 February 1998

10.25 Visit (UK): Foxburrow Farm

11.45 Visit (UK): Broxtead Estate

14.30 Visit (UK): Suffolk ESA, Stanny Farm

16.30 Visit (UK): Deben Farm Club (Speech and questions)

Monday 9 February 1998

12.30 Lunch with Director, Soil Association, Organic Aid

15.00 Meeting with NFU: Pig Welfare

Tuesday 10 February 1998

10.00 Visit (UK) with SHRIM Farms (Speech), The Coach House, Great Saling

15.00 Meeting with John Toothill, Steele Addison: CAP Reform Agri-Environment Measures

16.00 Meeting with Vanya Hackel (Fisheries Reform Group)

Thursday 12 February 1998

09.30 Meeting with Bob Blizzard MP: MAGP IV

Monday 16 February 1998

15.30 Meeting with Wildlife Link

Tuesday 17 February 1998

09.50 Meeting with Suffolk FWAG (Speech)

14.30 Meeting with MPs: Bodmin Moor Bill

Wednesday 18 February 1998

11.00 Meeting with National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations

14.30 Meeting with Tenant Farmers: Annual General Meeting

17.00 Meeting with MPs: Animal Welfare

Thursday 19 February 1998

16.00 Meeting with British Veterinary Association

17.30 Meeting with Chief Executive, RSPB

Monday 23 February 1998

09.30 Visit (UK) with Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (Speech)

17.00 Meeting with COPA Officeholders

Wednesday 25 February 1998

19.00 Meeting with National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations: Drift Nets

Thursday 26 February 1998

Meeting with South Devon & Channel Shellfishermen: Mid Channel Conference

MINISTER FOR FARMING AND THE FOOD INDUSTRY

(Lord Donoughue)

1 February 1998 to 28 February 1998

Tuesday 3 February 1998

13.00 NFU AGM, Inter-Continental Hotel, Hyde Park Corner

15.00 Meeting with NFU County Chairman, Inter-Continental Hotel, Hyde Park Corner

19.30 NFU Annual Dinner, Hilton Hotel

Wednesday 4 February 1998

12.30 Launch of Kentish Fare (Speech)

Thursday 5 February 1998

10.15 Meeting with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister

Monday 9 February 1998

16.00 Meeting with Guild of Food Writers

15.00 Meeting with National Association of Cider Makers

Monday 16 February 1998

Agriculture Council, Brussels

Monday 23 February 1998

10.00 Farmers Weekly EMU Conference (Speech)

13.00 Meeting with Agricultural Advisory Group

17.00 Meeting with COPA

Wednesday 25 February 1998

15.00 Meeting with US Under Secretary for Agriculture: WTO ruling on hormones

Thursday 26 February 1998

12.45 Meeting with David Bowe MEP: Use of GM crops

Cattle Tracing

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the cattle tracing system is expected to start operating. [38967]

Dr. John Cunningham: The launch date for the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) will be 28 September 1998. The system will register cattle and their movements from birth to death. It is an enhancement to the current cattle passport database which already holds details of over five million cattle born or imported into Great Britain from 1 July 1996. The main change will be to hold in addition the movement history of all those cattle registered on to the system from 28 September.

A new organisation, the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), is being set up in Workington, Cumbria to run the CTS. Recruitment is going well, with applications of high quality; buildings have been handed over on time; the main equipment has been installed; and development of the new system is in hand.

The Government are today sending to all cattle farmers, livestock markets and operators of abattoirs in Great Britain a leaflet about CTS. The leaflet gives details of the new cattle passport which will be introduced as part of the CTS. The new passport will include details of the animal, details of where it has been throughout its life, cards for owners of cattle to send in when the animal moves, a record of Beef Special Premium and eventually, details of the death of the animal. Cattle with the new passport will not require a separate Cattle Identification Document for Beef Special Premium, thus reducing one element of paperwork for farmers.

The leaflet we are sending out today is the first in a series which will be sent to cattle farmers between now and the launch of CTS on 28 September, to familiarise everyone with their role in the new system.

As I have previously announced, the Government have decided that they will meet the costs not only of setting up the CTS, but also of running and enforcing it during its first full year of operation. This is a step of real value to the livestock industry, with Government bearing costs of the order of £35 million on behalf of the industry.

The CTS offers great opportunities to the British Cattle industry. The new system will make it possible to check easily where cattle have been during their lives, trace cattle more easily if there is a disease outbreak, and give greater assurance to buyers about an animal's history, and so help to rebuild confidence in British cattle and British beef, at home and abroad.

Animal Waste

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of the United Kingdom legislation controlling the disposal of animal waste to be completed. [38790]

Mr. Rooker: The review is almost complete and revised legislation is being drafted as a basis for consultation.

Public Analyst Service

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of the Public Analyst Service in England and Wales to be completed. [38804]

Mr. Rooker: I expect to announce the arrangements and terms of reference for the review very shortly. I hope the review will be completed before the end of the year.

Milk Development Council

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of the Milk Development Council to be completed. [38814]

Mr. Rooker: The review of the Milk Development Council was completed in October 1997 and its remit was extended for a further five years with effect from 7 February 1998.

Quarantine

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of the current rules on quarantine of imported pet animals to be completed. [38810]

Mr. Rooker: I now expect to receive the report of the Advisory Group on quarantine in June. It will then be published and a full public consultation held.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the projected expenditure of the Meat Hygiene Service from 1 April. [38076]

Mr. Rooker: The latest estimate of the total gross expenditure of the Meat Hygiene Service for 1998/99 is £62 million.

The Meat Hygiene Service is required to recover the full costs of providing its inspection service. Approximately half of these costs are recovered from the industry for meat hygiene and inspection controls and the remainder from government, predominantly for specified risk material controls.

Forecasts of Meat Hygiene Service expenditure for future years are not available.

Live Animal Exports

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* live sheep and *(b)* live pigs were exported from the United Kingdom in 1997 for (i) slaughter, (ii) further fattening and (iii) breeding; and how many live (1) sheep and (2) pigs in each of these categories were exported to each individual country of destination. [37196]

Mr. Rooker: The table, derived from Departmental records, gives details of sheep and pigs certified for export from the United Kingdom. The figures do not include information on the number of sheep exported from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland as sheep are not officially certified for such trade under a special arrangement provided for in EC trade rules.

Numbers of sheep and pigs certified for export from the United Kingdom in 1997

Country	*Sheep*			*Pigs*		
	Slaughter	*Further fattening*	*Breeding*	*Slaughter*	*Further fattening*	*Breeding*
Belgium	—	17,677	144	300	4,876	41,895
Canada	—	—	—	—	—	600
Chile	—	—	—	—	—	270
China	—	—	—	—	—	795
Czech Republic	—	—	—	—	—	564
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—	1,064
Falkland Islands	—	—	—	—	—	25
France	28,294	201,073	413	—	—	24,739
Germany	—	14,561	1	253	7,219	43,041
Greece	—	—	—	—	—	689
Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	94
Italy	—	1,815	—	2,561	321	9,551
Japan	—	—	—	—	—	750

Numbers of sheep and pigs certified for export from the United Kingdom in 1997

Country	Sheep			Pigs		
	Slaughter	Further fattening	Breeding	Slaughter	Further fattening	Breeding
Latvia	—	—	—	—	—	151
Malaysia	—	—	—	—	—	338
Mexico	—	—	—	—	—	1,070
Netherlands	—	168,510	82	1,542	467	18,700
Nigeria	—	—	—	—	—	46
North Korea	—	—	—	—	—	70
Philippines	—	—	—	—	—	340
Poland	—	—	—	—	—	113
Portugal	—	—	—	—	—	83
Republic of Ireland	1,212	—	177	78,270	326	2,119
Romania	—	—	—	—	—	217
Russia	—	—	—	—	—	350
Slovakia	—	—	—	—	—	111
South Korea	—	—	—	—	—	684
Spain	6,689	669	350	—	2,050	373,024
Taiwan	—	—	—	—	—	70
Thailand	—	—	—	—	—	545
United States of America	—	—	—	—	—	122
Vietnam	—	—	—	—	—	874
Total	36,195	404,305	1,167	82,926	15,259	523,104

This information is provisional and subject to change.

It is common practice for export health certificates to be issued in anticipation of exports which do not then take place. The central computer system is updated periodically to remove details of withdrawn export consignments from the records but we cannot guarantee that this information is complete. Confirmation of the actual numbers of animals exported could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Fisheries

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *135*, if he is now able to state the membership of the review team and the terms of reference of the Review of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Legislation. [37348]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *234–35*.

Meat Imports

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at which ports since 1 May 1997 checks have been carried out into the quality of imported consignments of meat; what proportion of those checks have involved inspections of (i) the meat, (ii) the documentation and (iii) both; what assessment he has made of the value of checks involving *(a)* meat and *(b)* documentation; and if he will make a statement. [38580]

Mr. Rooker: The following table records the number of checks carried out at Border Inspection Posts in the UK on consignments of meat and meat products imported from countries outside the EU. So far as meat from other Member States is concerned, single market rules provide only for random, non-discriminatory checks at destination, not at ports of entry.

Checks on meat and meat products imports from third countries
1 May 1997 to 28 February 1998

Port of entry	Number of consignments	Number of documentary checks	Number of identity checks	Number of physical checks
Felixtowe	1,343	1,343	311	311
Port of Tilbury	7,657	7,657	853	850
Heathrow	520	520	80	67
Southampton	848	848	7	6
Gatwick Airport	351	351	262	258
Thamesport	142	142	33	33
Manchester Airport	12	12	8	7
Liverpool Port	13	13	7	7
Belfast Harbour	13	13	9	8
East Midlands	3	3	3	3
Hull	2	2	2	2
Belfast Airport	1	1	0	0

Checks on meat and meat products imports from third countries
1 May 1997 to 28 February 1998

Port of entry	*Number of consignments*	*Number of documentary checks*	*Number of identity checks*	*Number of physical checks*
Cardiff	1	1	1	1
Tyne	5	5	0	0
Aberdeen	1	1	1	1
Dover	2	2	2	2
Total	10,914	10,914	1,579	1,556

Milk Prices

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the reasons for the discrepancy between the recent movement of prices of milk *(a)* at the farm gate and *(b)* at supermarkets. [38470]

Mr. Rooker: Retail prices are affected by several factors apart from agricultural raw material costs, such as processing, marketing and distribution costs, and the marketing strategies of individual competing retailers. The recent, apparent increase in the difference between the farm-gate and retail milk prices follows a period during which that difference fell.

Organophosphates

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when and for what purposes the organophosphate pesticide Fonofos, manufactured by Zeneca, was licensed; what warnings were given to users to prevent harmful effects to wildlife; and if he will make a statement on the information made available about the product. [38428]

Mr. Rooker: Fonofos was first cleared for use in the UK in 1970; its main uses are as a treatment for cereal seed and as a spray for brassicas and ornamental crops. Warnings about effects on wildlife are carried on the product labels.

The Wildlife Incidents Investigation Scheme received reports of incidents involving birds and the risk to birds was reviewed by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides in 1994. The Committee advised that approval could continue with a user education programme being carried out by Zeneca and a five year assessment of the programme and its impact on reported incidents.

The user education programme, including a leaflet and warning stickers for drilling equipment and seed bags/pallets, was implemented by Zeneca and only one incident has been reported in the first three years.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has conducted into the effect of (i) phosmet and (ii) other organophosphates on prion protein metabolism; and what plans he has to conduct further research. [38602]

Mr. Rooker: None. We would, however, be prepared to consider research applications from scientists who wish to work in this area as part of our ongoing commitment to support research, including independent research, into BSE. Any application would be considered on its own merits in competition with other applications for financial support.

Bananas

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to assist developing countries with exports of fairly-traded bananas. [39005]

Mr. Rooker: This Government are sympathetic to the idea of encouraging "Fair Trade" in exports of some products from developing countries. On bananas, we have, as Presidency, initiated discussions in the context of the current negotiations on the EU regime on what might be done to promote the marketing of Fair Trade bananas. We await a communication on this from the Commission. It will of course need to respect our obligations under the World Trade Organisation.

Tups

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the price of tups. [39202]

Mr. Rooker: Although we have had representations from all the main organisations representing sheep farmers' interests about the poor returns experienced on the sale of lambs, no one has raised concerns about the price of tups.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *728*, if the legal fees specified include the costs of litigation by the contractor over alleged changes of specification at short notice; and if he will list the costs and legal fees incurred. [38150]

Mr. Rooker: The legal fees mentioned in my answer of 5 March relate to fees generally incurred in major projects of this sort. There is no litigation by the contractor. Legal fees to date are in the order of £40,000.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Physical Education

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates he has made of the average number of hours per week spent on physical education in primary schools in (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [31001]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department carried out a survey of PE and sport in English schools in January 1996. It found that primary school pupils had on average 1.5 to 2 hours per week of National Curriculum PE. No information is held on 1979–80 or 1996–97.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve the quality of physical education in primary schools. [31002]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are committed to improving the quality of education in all subjects in all schools.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect on physical education teaching of his proposed changes to the National Curriculum. [31004]

Ms Estelle Morris: None. Physical Education is to remain a National Curriculum subject and will continue to be taught in all schools.

Supported Employment Programme

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many places were allocated to each district and region under the supported employment programme in 1997–98; and what is the estimated number of places for 1998–99; [37298]

(2) what increase has been budgeted in the revenue grant for each disabled employee in sheltered workshops for 1998–99; and what allowance has been made for inflation. [37299]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 20 April 1998:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply direct to your questions about what increase has been budgeted in the revenue grant for each disabled employee in supported workshops for 1998–99; what allowance has been made for inflation; how many places were allocated to each district and region under the supported employment programme in 1997–98; and what is the number of estimated places for 1998–99. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

As the budget for the Supported Employment Programme remains the same for 1998–99 as for 1997–98, the maximum grant level made available for the supported workshop and supported placements provision will remain at £4,680 per contracted place.

Turning to your question about how many places were allocated in 1997–98 and the estimated numbers for 1998–99, supported employment is delivered through Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations and by Remploy Ltd. At the beginning of each year the Employment Service negotiates and reaches agreement with supported employment providers to deliver an agreed minimum number of places against the maximum grant level. Negotiations with Remploy are based on targets agreed within an Annual Performance Agreement.

The agreed national target for 1997–98 and 1998–99 for places in supported employment provided by Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations is 12,250. In addition, Remploy Ltd. have a target minimum number of places of 9,800 for 1997–98 and 10,050 for 1998–99. In order to achieve the target of 12,250 for non-Remploy places we contract for slightly higher numbers, which allows for variations in filled places and enables us to make maximum use of the funds available to the Programme. In 1997–98, 12,426.5 places were allocated to Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations. For 1998–99 we have allocated 12,436.

Because the Supported Employment Programme is managed at national rather than regional level, I regret that it is not possible to provide figures at regional and district level.

I hope this is helpful.

Special Schools

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages of including special schools for children with profound learning disabilities in performance league tables. [37462]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are committed to making school performance tables as clear and helpful as possible. They should reflect the achievements of all pupils, including the achievements of those with profound learning disabilities. Secondary school tables list special schools in a separate section, and we are currently consulting on measures to ensure that the secondary tables as a whole give a more complete picture of achievement across the board.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the relevance of the National Curriculum and OFSTED inspections to schools for children with profound learning disabilities. [37461]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have high expectations for all children including those with special educational needs. Ofsted inspections indentify schools' strengths and weaknesses so that they may improve the quality of the education they provide and raise the standards achieved by their pupils. Teams inspecting special schools must include expertise in the main types of special educational need represented in the school as well as the ability to ensure reasonable sampling of the subjects across the age range of pupils at the school.

All children are entitled to participate in the National Curriculum and we are committed to ensuring that it is accessible and relevant to pupils with special educational needs. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has issued guidance on a variety of approaches to present the National Curriculum to pupils with profound and multiple difficulties. Many special schools have already successfully challenged low expectations and differentiated the curriculum to meet a wide range of needs.

E-mail (Schools)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he estimates every school student will have their own e-mail address. [37943]

Dr. Howells: The target set out in the Government's consultation paper, "Connecting the Learning Society", is that by 2002 all schools, colleges, universities and libraries and as many community centres as possible should be connected to the National Grid for Learning, enabling 75 per cent. of teachers and lecturers and 50 per cent. of pupils and students to use their own e-mail addresses.

GCSE Examinations

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils in each local education authority sat GCSE examinations in 1997; and of those how many sat *(a)* nine or more, *(b)* five to eight and *(c)* fewer than five GCSE examinations. [38294]

Dr. Howells: The information requested in respect of GCSEs is shown in the table.

Number of 15 year old pupils attempting GCSE or the GNVQ equivalent in maintained schools in England in 1997

Local education authority	*Total attempting*	*9 or more (a)*	*Number of 15 year olds attempting: 5 to 8 (b)*	*Less than 5 (c)*
Camden	1,580	1,001	489	90
Greenwich	2,176	1,392	632	152
Hackney	1,268	803	322	143
Hammersmith & Fulham	982	480	411	91
Islington	1,283	607	565	111
Kensington & Chelsea	549	388	108	53
Lambeth	1,207	617	461	129
Lewisham	1,923	891	853	179
Southwark	1,703	863	693	147
Tower Hamlets	2,223	1,266	758	199
Wandsworth	1,590	966	490	134
Westminster	1,205	500	596	109
Barking & Dagenham	1,599	1,126	390	83
Barnet	3,071	2,412	570	89
Bexley	2,417	1,809	557	51
Brent	2,091	1,541	456	94
Bromley	2,900	2,365	477	58
Croydon	3,107	2,054	857	196
Ealing	2,370	1,812	464	94
Enfield	3,036	1,677	1,211	148
Haringey	1,591	768	609	214
Harrow	2,016	1,626	332	58
Havering	2,702	2,181	458	63
Hillingdon	2,352	1,563	652	137
Hounslow	2,477	1,766	509	202
Kingston upon Thames	1,237	935	255	47
Merton	1,428	890	469	69
Newham	2,628	1,791	699	138
Redbridge	2,560	2,070	379	111
Richmond upon Thames	1,478	1,178	250	50
Sutton	1,921	1,501	379	41
Waltham Forest	2,164	1,435	595	134
Birmingham	10,726	6,512	3,585	629
Coventry	3,174	2,225	745	204
Dudley	3,448	2,292	1,008	148
Sandwell	3,223	2,011	1,010	202
Solihull	2,608	1,810	717	81
Walsall	3,163	1,954	880	329
Wolverhampton	2,516	1,640	757	119
Knowsley	1,610	750	705	155
Liverpool	4,910	2,391	2,046	473
St. Helens	2,055	1,233	750	72
Sefton	3,320	2,373	855	92
Wirral	3,650	2,488	1,002	160
Bolton	3,015	2,058	855	102
Bury	2,076	1,637	403	36
Manchester	3,563	1,801	1,402	360
Oldham	2,879	1,927	793	159
Rochdale	2,203	1,453	637	113
Salford	2,164	1,112	916	136
Stockport	2,844	1,710	1,067	67
Tameside	2,536	1,602	826	108
Trafford	2,427	1,665	680	82
Wigan	3,782	2,802	829	151
Barnsley	2,334	1,337	871	126
Doncaster	3,235	2,131	914	190
Rotherham	3,254	2,229	878	147
Sheffield	4,595	3,199	1,181	215
Bradford	5,597	3,161	2,047	389
Calderdale	2,219	1,474	597	148
Kirklees	4,225	2,953	1,105	167
Leeds	7,041	4,724	1,990	327
Wakefield	3,490	2,257	1,032	201
Gateshead	1,998	1,368	540	90
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,384	1,377	822	185
North Tyneside	2,026	1,698	284	44
South Tyneside	1,763	1,201	494	68
Sunderland	3,530	2,459	901	170
Isles of Scilly	18	15	3	0
Bath and North East Somerset	1,954	1,495	390	69
City of Bristol	2,924	1,928	786	210
North Somerset	1,902	1,296	554	52
South Gloucestershire	2,512	1,942	499	71
Hartlepool	1,012	693	253	66
Middlesbrough	1,683	924	612	147
Redcar and Cleveland	1,860	1,269	486	105

Number of 15 year old pupils attempting GCSE or the GNVQ equivalent in maintained schools in England in 1997

Local education authority	Total attempting	9 or more (a)	Number of 15 year olds attempting: 5 to 8 (b)	Less than 5 (c)
Stockton on Tees	2,284	1,522	655	107
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	2,525	1,617	724	184
East Riding of Yorkshire	3,526	2,789	636	101
North East Lincolnshire	1,953	1,438	420	95
North Lincolnshire	1,989	1,567	333	89
North Yorkshire	6,294	4,999	1,123	172
York	1,675	1,265	354	56
Bedfordshire	4,168	3,427	635	106
Luton	2,199	1,597	516	86
Buckinghamshire	5,149	3,969	1,029	151
Milton Keynes	2,350	1,962	292	96
Derbyshire	7,728	5,750	1,694	284
City of Derby	2,588	1,658	826	104
Dorset	3,975	3,193	690	92
Poole	1,485	1,080	320	85
Bournemouth	1,526	1,136	327	63
Durham	5,705	3,908	1,468	329
Darlington	1,024	775	221	28
East Sussex	4,444	3,542	750	152
Brighton and Hove	1,887	1,374	418	95
Hampshire	12,432	10,013	2,085	334
Portsmouth	1,585	1,179	313	93
Southampton	2,185	1,600	449	136
Leicestershire	6,500	4,411	1,839	250
Leicester City	3,262	1,530	1,483	249
Rutland	437	365	66	6
Staffordshire	9,097	6,086	2,724	287
Stoke-on-Trent	2,521	1,467	914	140
Wiltshire	4,213	2,953	1,113	147
Swindon	1,799	1,202	519	78
Berkshire	8,143	6,020	1,866	257
Cambridgeshire	7,255	5,543	1,441	271
Cheshire	11,205	8,634	2,211	360
Cornwall	5,236	3,752	1,297	187
Cumbria	5,348	3,871	1,253	224
Devon	10,692	7,305	2,920	467
Essex	17,107	12,765	3,707	635
Gloucestershire	5,708	4,198	1,299	211
Hereford & Worcester	7,313	5,047	1,961	305
Hertfordshire	11,040	8,764	1,990	286
Isle of Wight	1,291	933	319	39
Kent	17,310	11,226	5,363	721
Lancashire	15,405	10,455	4,333	617
Lincolnshire	6,769	4,201	2,288	280
Norfolk	8,024	5,387	2,280	357
Northamptonshire	6,936	5,104	1,588	244
Northumberland	3,644	2,811	720	113
Nottinghamshire	11,045	7,760	2,825	550
Oxfordshire	5,803	4,412	1,160	231
Shropshire	4,822	3,724	941	157
Somerset	4,845	3,694	1,025	126
Suffolk	6,853	5,475	1,184	194
Surrey	8,932	7,228	1,490	214
Warwickshire	5,092	3,532	1,395	165
West Sussex	7,535	6,062	1,324	149
Total	508,140	356,037	129,769	22,334

School Exclusions and Expulsions (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by school in the Easington constituency the number of pupils by age who have been *(a)* excluded and *(b)* expelled in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997. [37858]

Ms Estelle Morris: Information on excluded pupils in individual schools is not published centrally.

School Exclusions (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many permanent exclusions there were from schools in Leicestershire in the last year for which figures are available. [37918]

Ms Estelle Morris: In 1995/96, the last year for which figures are available, there were 240 permanent exclusions from schools in Leicestershire.

School Psychologists

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the ratio of school psychologists to school pupils for each local education authority area. [37958]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information is shown in the following table:

Educational psychologists per 10,000 pupils—January 1997

Local education authority	*Ratio*
City of London	0.0
Camden	2.8
Greenwich	3.6
Hackney	3.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	3.2
Islington	4.0
Kensington and Chelsea	4.2
Lambeth	4.2
Lewisham	3.4
Southwark	3.2
Tower Hamlets	3.8
Wandsworth	3.2
Westminster	3.0
Barking and Dagenham	4.6
Barnet	3.1
Bexley	2.9
Brent	2.5
Bromley	2.4
Croydon	1.9
Ealing	2.7
Enfield	3.2
Haringey	4.3
Harrow	2.7
Havering	2.1
Hillingdon	2.7
Hounslow	2.6
Kingston upon Thames	2.1
Merton	2.4
Newham	2.7
Redbridge	1.9
Richmond upon Thames	2.1
Sutton	1.9
Waltham Forest	3.6
Birmingham	2.0
Coventry	2.5
Dudley	2.1
Sandwell	2.6
Solihull	2.4
Walsall	2.1
Wolverhampton	2.6
Knowsley	2.9
Liverpool	1.8
St. Helens	1.9
Sefton	1.9
Wirral	2.2
Bolton	1.7
Bury	2.4
Manchester	2.2
Oldham	1.5
Rochdale	2.2
Salford	2.4
Stockport	2.4
Tameside	2.0
Trafford	1.3
Wigan	2.3
Barnsley	1.1
Doncaster	2.0
Rotherham	2.5
Sheffield	2.2
Bradford	1.9
Calderdale	2.3
Kirklees	3.2
Leeds	1.2
Wakefield	1.7
Gateshead	2.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	2.7
North Tyneside	2.0
South Tyneside	2.2
Sunderland	2.2

Educational psychologists per 10,000 pupils—January 1997

Local education authority	*Ratio*
Isles of Scilly	0.0
Bath and NE Somerset	1.7
City of Bristol	2.3
North Somerset	2.1
South Gloucestershire	1.6
Hartlepool	1.9
Middlesbrough	1.8
Redcar and Cleveland	1.9
Stockton on Tees	2.4
City of Kingston upon Hull	1.7
East Riding of Yorkshire	1.6
North East Lincolnshire	1.4
North Lincolnshire	1.5
North Yorkshire	1.4
York ,	2.5
Bedfordshire	1.6
Berkshire	1.5
Buckinghamshire	2.2
Cambridgeshire	1.7
Cheshire	1.6
Cornwall	1.7
Cumbria	2.1
Derbyshire	1.9
Devon	2.0
Dorset	1.9
Durham	2.3
East Sussex	1.7
Essex	2.5
Gloucestershire	0.9
Hampshire	2.1
Hereford and Worcester	1.9
Hertfordshire	1.8
Isle of Wight	2.0
Kent	2.0
Lancashire	2.1
Leicestershire	1.7
Lincolnshire	1.9
Norfolk	1.9
Northamptonshire	2.1
Northumberland	1.7
Nottinghamshire	1.9
Oxfordshire	1.8
Shropshire	1.8
Somerset	2.0
Staffordshire	1.6
Suffolk	1.5
Surrey	1.9
Warwickshire	1.8
West Sussex	2.0
Wiltshire	1.4
Total	2.1

Value-added Measures

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures are being taken to promote use of the concept of value added among local education authorities and in schools and colleges; and if he will make a statement. [38371]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has just published a compendium, including illustrative value added information, for use by local education authorities (LEAs) to support their role in helping schools to interpret performance data and set challenging targets. National value-added information, using results form the 1998 National Curriculum assessments and public examinations, will be sent directly to schools in the Autumn as part of a package of performance information.

Export Training

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the role of training and enterprise councils in facilitating training relating to exports. [38122]

Dr. Howells: We expect TECs to tailor their services to the needs of their local areas. With and through their Business Link Partnerships, they provide a wide range of help to exporters, including providing training where appropriate.

Skill Shortages (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the areas of skill shortages in the Seaham and Peterlee areas. [37912]

Dr. Howells: The Department has made no assessment of the areas of skill shortages in the Seaham and Peterlee areas.

However, the Education and Training sub-group of the East Durham Task Force, jointly chaired by the Chief Executive of the County Durham TEC and the Principal of Peterlee College, is still looking into skill shortages in the Easington, Peterlee and Seaham areas. Engineering skills have been identified as a difficulty, and County Durham TEC has provided £100,000 to enhance facilities at the Engineering Centre at Peterlee.

New Deal

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* the New Deal units of delivery, *(b)* the partnerships and *(c)* the organisation taking the lead in each unit throughout the UK; and if he will make a statement. [38098]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* I have placed in the Library a list of the 143 New Deal units of delivery in England, Scotland and Wales which includes details of the organisation taking the lead in each unit.

Each unit has a strategic partnership involving a variety of key players from the local area such as the local authority, the TEC and representatives of employers and the voluntary sector. The composition of each has been different depending upon the particular local needs of the area. These partnerships have worked with the Employment Service to develop the delivery plans for each unit. Each unit will also have a range of delivery partners for each of the elements of New Deal and again the numbers of partners involved will vary depending upon the needs of young people and size of the client group joining New Deal.

We do not have the information centrally to complete a list of all those involved in every partnership across the country.

School Closures (Staffordshire)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the schools which have closed in Staffordshire since 1983. [36958]

Mr. Byers: Shown in the table which I have placed in the Library, are all the maintained schools which, according to the Department's information, have been closed in Staffordshire since 1983. A number of the listed schools have closed as a result of amalgamations with other schools while others have closed to facilitate a change in age range. In such cases the replacement schools are also listed.

Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will exempt students on four year B.Ed (Hons) courses from paying fees for the fourth year. [39166]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have already announced that trainee teachers on postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) courses will not have to make means-tested contributions towards tuition fees. We see PGCE courses as a priority, as this is the route followed by most trainee secondary teachers, and under-recruitment has only affected secondary training courses to date. We have no plans to make similar provision for BEd courses, but continue to monitor recruitment to all courses.

Music (Schools)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for the provision of music in schools. [37415]

Ms Estelle Morris: Music will remain a National Curriculum foundation subject and will continue to be taught in all schools. In addition, the Government are currently considering ways in which it might be possible to increase opportunities for children to have equitable access to high quality musical instrument tuition.

Special Needs

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if it is the Government's long-term policy that individual children with special educational needs should have a continuing legal entitlement to receive the special educational provision that their needs require. [38429]

Ms Estelle Morris: Yes.

Job Club (Sutton)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the start-up costs of opening the Sutton Job Club, Lewis Road, Sutton, in October 1997; when, and by whom, the decision was taken to close the Sutton Job Club; and what costs have been incurred in closing the club. [39050]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Foster to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 20 April 1998:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked Leigh Lewis to reply to your question about the start-up costs of opening the Sutton Jobclub, Lewis Road,

Sutton, in October 1997; when, and by whom, the decision was taken to close the Sutton Jobclub; and what costs have been incurred in closing club. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to Mr. Lewis as Chief Executive of the Agency. I am replying in his absence.

There were no costs incurred by the Employment Service in setting up Sutton Jobclub. The decision to close the Jobclub was taken by Colin Purtill, the Employment Service District Manager responsible for services in Sutton, after consultation in the locality in January and February 1998.

There will be no additional costs incurred in closing the Jobclub. The Employment Service pays fees to its contracted providers monthly in arrears. The Jobclub contract allows for an early termination without penalty provided at least six weeks notice is given. In this instance the provider who runs our Sutton Jobclub, Instant Muscle, was given eight weeks notice to close on 1 May 1998.

I hope this is helpful.

HEALTH

Breast Cancer

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set a target for reduction in breast cancer mortality in women aged over 65 years. [38152]

Mr. Boateng: Cancer is one of the four priority areas identified in the Green Paper, *Our Healthier Nation*, which was published for consultation on 5 February 1998. At present, the strategy proposes a national target to reduce the death rate from cancer amongst people aged under 65 years by at least a fifth by 2010. This will also benefit those aged over 65 years. A decision on whether this national target should be modified will be made in the light of consultation responses. The Green Paper also emphasises the need for local targets to identify particular areas of local concern.

We are committed to reducing breast cancer mortality for all women. The new National Health Service White Paper gives a guarantee that everyone with suspected breast cancer will be able to see a specialist within two weeks of general practitioner referral.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of all tests for cervical cancers were false positives in the last year for which information is available; and how many unnecessary remedial procedures have been carried out in each of the past 10 years. [38739]

Mr. Boateng: Cervical screening is not a test for cervical cancer itself. Cervical screening can prevent cancer of the cervix by finding abnormal cells before they become cancerous, enabling treatment to be given to prevent cancer developing. Not all abnormal cells will become cancerous, but it is not possible to tell in advance how many women with abnormal changes to the cervix will go on to develop cancer if left untreated. Around 100,000 women are referred to colposcopy clinics each year for further assessment and/or treatment.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths and what proportion of all deaths of women aged over 40 years were from cervical cancer in each year since 1975; and what assessment he has made of the measurable effect of screening on the death rate. [38764]

Mr. Boateng: The number and proportion of deaths in women aged over 40 years from cervical cancer have fallen dramatically since 1975. In particular, the number of deaths from cervical cancer has fallen by a third since the National Health Service cervical screening programme was set up in 1988, as the table shows:

Year	*Cervical cancer deaths of women aged over 40*	*Cervical cancer as percentage of all deaths to women aged over 40*
1975	2,008	0.72
1976	2,076	0.72
1977	1,998	0.72
1978	1,978	0.70
1979	1,919	0.67
1980	1,872	0.67
1981	1,810	0.65
1982	1,733	0.61
1983	1,743	0.62
1984	1,690	0.61
1985	1,709	0.59
1986	1,747	0.61
1987	1,644	0.59
1988	1,712	0.61
1989	1,579	0.55
1990	1,554	0.55
1991	1,457	0.51
1992	1,487	0.52
1993	1,319	0.45
1994	1,217	0.44
1995	1,158	0.40
1996	1,156	0.41

Cervical screening is estimated to prevent between 1,100 and 3,900 cases of invasive cervical cancer each year (Imperial Cancer Research Fund), and the death rate from cervical cancer is currently falling by seven per cent. each year.

Section 64 Funding

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the beneficiaries of the most recent section 64 allocations of funding; if he will list the criteria by which section 64 applications are judged; and when applications for the next round of section 64 funding will be invited. [38798]

Mr. Boateng: A list of new and renewal section 64 grant awards for 1998–99 approved by the Department's Ministers has been placed in the Library.

The awards were determined by reference to the extent to which it was considered they will help to meet the Department's objectives and priorities. Each application was considered on its merits.

Application forms for the next annual section 64 round will be issued in July, to be returned to the Department by 1 October 1998.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instigate an immediate inquiry into age discrimination in the delivery of health services. [38991]

Mr. Boateng: The Government's commitment to promoting a fair and equitable health service is set out in the 1998/99 priorities and planning guidance for the National Health Service. Whatever the age of the patient,

there are no exceptions to the fundamental principle that the NHS is there to provide services for everybody on the basis of clinical need. The White Paper *The New NHS* also sets out our proposals for a new national performance framework for the NHS which will focus on six areas of performance selected to capture what really counts for patients and staff. One of these six areas will be that of fair access to health services in relation to people's needs, irrespective of geography, class, ethnicity, age or sex.

In response to the recent campaign by the *Observer* newspaper entitled "Dignity on the Ward", which raised the issue of age discrimination in the delivery of health services, amongst other things, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has commissioned HAS 2000 (formerly the Health Advisory Service) to examine the care which acute hospitals provide for older people. HAS 2000 are expected to look at the care which acute hospitals provide for older people nationwide, and examine one or two hospitals in greater detail. They will report directly to my right hon. Friend, who plans to publish their report. The study will be undertaken between January and June 1998.

Mental Health

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the guidelines for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Fund, separately identifying the *(a)* criteria for inviting bids, *(b)* factors to be considered in evaluating bids and *(c)* timescale for bidding and implementation; and if he will make a statement. [39008]

Mr. Boateng: We expect to publish guidance in May giving full information about the specific grant to local authorities, in partnership with linked health authorities, for development of services for children and adolescents with a mental illness.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the needs not currently met from existing provision in respect of children's and adolescents' mental health care; what proportion of these needs will be met by the CAMHS Fund; what measures he plans to meet these needs in areas where CAMHS Fund money is not allocated; and if he will make a statement. [39007]

Mr. Boateng: We are aware of the variations in service provision for children and young people with mental health problems across the country. Social care regions, jointly with regional offices of the National Health Service Executive, have undertaken a number of region-wide surveys of provision for child and adolescent mental health services. They will enable appropriate action to be taken to help ensure a more even spread of service provision. Priorities for action have to be decided locally in the light of the assessed needs of the local population.

The child and adolescent mental health services fund is not aimed at filling gaps in existing services. It is intended to help support a small number of innovative pilot projects designed to develop good practice. Bids from local authorities, agreed with partner health authorities, will be invited shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Exports

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences for arms have been granted to United Kingdom firms since September 1997; and in respect of which countries of destination. [33831]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 10 March 1998]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the results are as follows for the period between 13 November 1997 and 2 February 1998 inclusive. 4,014 Standard Individual Export Licences and 55 Open Individual Export Licences were issued for the export of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order (the so-called "Military List"). These licences covered exports to consignees and/or end-users in the following countries:

Afghanistan, Angola, Netherlands Antilles, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bermuda, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Canada, Cayman Islands, Channel Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Cambodia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, the Falkland Islands, Finland, France, French Guiana, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greece, Grenada, Guyana, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the People's Republic of China, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, St. Helena, St. Vincent, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

This information should be considered in light of my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

The list necessarily takes no account of Media OIELs, which are Open Individual Export Licences that authorise the export to any destination of protective clothing for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists working in areas of conflict.

The Government are committed to report annually on strategic export controls and their application.

London Art Market

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the principal EU regulations and directives which affect the London art market; and what further measures are anticipated. [37416]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The principal EU regulations and directives which affect the London art market are as follows:

Customs and VAT Directives

Commission Regulation (EEC) No. 2454/93 which implements the Community Customs Code (Council Regulation (EEC) No. 92/2913, Council Regulation (EEC) No. 918/83, Council Directive 83/181/EEC and the Sixth VAT Directive (77/388/EEC) as amended by the Seventh VAT Directive (94/5/EC). Their effect is thus:

Commission Regulation (EEC) No. 2454/93

Article 682 suspends the payment of customs duty and import VAT for second-hand goods temporarily imported for sale by auction and also works of art, collectors' items, and antiques temporarily removed for exhibition, with a view to possible sale.

Other measures include the following:

Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3911/92 of 9 December 1992 on the export of cultural goods; Council Regulation (EC) No. 2469/96 of 16 December 1996 amending the Annex to Regulation (EEC) No. 3911/92 on the export of cultural goods; Council Directive 93/7 EEC of 15 March 1993 on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State; Directive 96/100/EEC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 February 1997 amending the Annex to Directive 93/7/EEC on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State. However, the latter two have not been used to date.

Council Regulation (EEC) No. 918/83 and Council Directive 83/181/EEC

Article 51 of Regulation 918/83 and Article 79(r) of Directive 83/181 provide relief from customs duty and import VAT respectively, under certain conditions, for items imported by approved museums of galleries for their collections.

Sixth VAT Directive

Article 16(E) enables relief from VAT on the sale of temporarily imported works of art and second-hand goods. Article 26a allows VAT on the sale of eligible works of art to be calculated by reference to the profit margin instead of the full sales value. Article 28 (1)a enables the UK to apply until 30 June 1999 an effective 2.5% VAT rate on the importation of works of art, collectors' items, or antiques which had been relieved from VAT before the implementation of the Seventh VAT Directive (94/5/EC). No further measures are anticipated in this area.

Copyright

In the field of copyright, the principal measure is an amended proposal (still under negotiation) for a European Parliament and Council Directive on the resale right for the benefit of an author of an original work of art—Com (1998) 78 final. No further measures are anticipated in this area.

Sale of Consumer Goods

A draft Directive on the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees, which would harmonise at a minimum level consumers' sale of goods rights, is currently being negotiated. The Directive, unlike UK law, does not make any special provision for the liability of sellers at auction and could have an adverse effect on the sale of goods—including art and antiques—at auction. However, the UK is seeking a derogation that would allow Member States to exclude used goods sold at auction.

Trade in Endangered Species

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) controls international trade of specimens of species listed in its appendices—including antiques. In the EU, it is given legal force by Council Regulation EC No. 338/97 and Commission Regulation EC No. 939/97. These regulations set out the rules for the import, export, re-export, sale and movement of species to which the controls apply. The regulation on trade is based on a system of permits and certificates which may only be issued where certain conditions are met. No further measures are anticipated in this area.

Electricity Trading Arrangements

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects the review of electricity trading arrangements to be completed. [38830]

Mr. Battle: I expect to receive advice in July from the Director General of Electricity Supply on proposals for new electricity trading arrangements.

Independent Booksellers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of independent booksellers (i) in 1987 and (ii) at the current date; and what assessment he has made of the impact on the traditional book trade of the growth of new retail outlets. [38748]

Mr. Battle: There are no official statistics available for the number of independent booksellers in 1987 or currently. Data produced by the Office for National Statistics (reference SDA25) are available for certain years for booksellers (businesses whose main sales are new or second-hand books) as follows:

Year	*Businesses*	*Outlets*
1986	2,567	3,175
1988	2,271	3,096
1990	2,323	3,495
1991	2,016	3,280
1992	2,195	3,790

The intermediate surveys in 1987 and 1989 did not provide results by detailed kind of business. After 1992, the results have been published on the basis of the Standard Industrial Classification (92), which combines booksellers with newsagents. However, these results do not give an analysis by number of outlets so it is not possible to estimate the number of independent booksellers.

I am aware of several factors affecting book sales at present, including the growth of new outlets, but no assessment has been made of their possible impact on the traditional booktrade. My Department is currently supporting the Booksellers Association of Great Britain and Ireland (BA) in its efforts to create an Internet site for the benefit of small and medium booksellers. In another initiative, involving the Publishers Association and the Booksellers Association, the Department has supported a study into book industry supply-chain.

Export Forum

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contribution her Department made to the budget of the Export Forum in the last financial year. [38881]

Mrs. Roche: The Department spent a total of £17,000 on the publication of the Export Forum report and on the travel expenses and refreshment of Forum members. A small amount of resource was also spent on photocopying costs and other small items of office support for the Forum, but it is not possible to separate this out from the generality of Departmental expenditure.

Dounreay

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent information she has received from the UKAEA in respect of the adequacy of the storage capacity for radioactive waste at Dounreay. [38901]

Mr. Battle: DTI receive regular reports from UKAEA which include projections of storage capacity. These are used by UKAEA to plan future storage facilities. Indications are that extra storage facilities will be required for immobilised Intermediate Level Waste by mid-2000. Work on storage facilities to house the waste to be retrieved from the Dounreay Shaft and Wet Silo will commence in about 2008.

Coal Contracts

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she hopes to conclude the Government's review of coal contracts and related matters. [39006]

Mr. Battle: The Government are undertaking a review of energy sources for power generation. Its terms of reference were set out in my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King) on 22 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*. The review is expected to reach conclusions before 30 June.

Newspaper Prices

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received regarding predatory pricing of national newspapers. [37424]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Department has received a number of representations relating to complaints about pricing practices in the newspaper industry, and about the amendment to the Competition Bill relating to newspapers which was passed in the other place. These representations have been from members of the public, newspaper undertakings, and Members of both Houses. It is for the Director General of Fair Trading to consider specific complaints about anti-competitive practices. In relation to the Competition Bill, the Government have made clear their view that the amendment accepted in the other place is unnecessary and unworkable.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Feltham Young Offenders Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* attempted suicides have occurred in Feltham Young Offenders Unit in each of the last five years. [38156]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table. This is shown as reported incidents of self-injury rather than attempted suicides since, as of 1 April 1997, the Prison Service now records incidents under this broader definition.

In interpreting the statistics on reported incidents of self-injury, it should be borne in mind that a single prisoner can accumulate more than one incident of self-injury. There have also been changes to recording and the definitions in establishments over time. Research is being conducted to identify more consistent methods of recording and monitoring self-injury.

Self-inflicted deaths and incidents of self-injury at Feltham YOI 1993–94—1997–98

Year	*Self-inflicted deaths*[1]	*Reported incidents of self-injury*
1993–94	—	36
1994–95	—	99
1995–96	—	532
1996–97	1	241
1997–98	2	[2]234

[1] Not all self-inflicted deaths conclude with a verdict of suicide.
[2] 1–4–97 to 28–2–98.

Young Offenders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *391*, to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), how many of the 277 young men held in adult prisons were aged 15 and 16 years; which prisons they were held in; and what was the number of 15 and 16 year olds held in each prison. [38587]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table. Of the 66 persons identified as being held in adult prisons, all are normally accommodated separately from adult prisoners.

Population of 15 and 16 year olds in adult prisons on 31 January 1998[1]

Establishment	*Number*
Altcourse	7
Cardiff	1
Doncaster	36
Exeter	2
Gloucester	5
Hull	7
Norwich	1
Parc	4
Swansea	3
Total	66

[1] Provisional figures

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15 and 16 year olds were held on remand in *(a)* Her Majesty's prisons and *(b)* young offender institutions on (i) 1 April 1997 and (ii) 1 April 1998. [38934]

Ms Quin: The available information relates to the remand prison population of 15 and 16 year olds in England and Wales on the last day of the month and is given in the table.

Population of 15 and 16 year olds on remand by type of Prison Service establishment[1]

Date	*Accommodation dedicated to young offenders*	*Other accommodation containing adults but who are kept in separate accommodation*
28 February 1998[2,3]	196	66
31 March 1997	189	72

[1] All those remanded were male.
[2] Provisional figures.
[3] Latest available.

Crime and Disorder Bill

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the categories of the persons and bodies referred to in section 6(2)(c) of the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] which he intends to prescribe by order. [38583]

Mr. Michael: We have not yet finally decided which persons or bodies will be prescribed under this power. A number of suggestions were made during the consultation period on our proposals for new statutory crime and disorder reduction partnerships, and we are currently considering these.

Enforced Subject Access

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to introduce proposals to halt the practice of enforced subject access; and if he will make a statement. [38416]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are committed to dealing with the problem of enforced subject access in the context of the Data Protection Bill. We intend to bring forward proposals at Committee Stage.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) of 15 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *11–12*, on animal experiments, what actions he has requested regulators of safety testing in the United Kingdom to carry out to attempt to reduce the number of animals used in safety tests. [38524]

Mr. George Howarth: Following a series of meetings at the Home Office, United Kingdom regulators have agreed to a statement of principle that any suffering caused to animals and the number of animals used in a safety evaluation protocol, should be the lowest necessary to achieve its identified objectives.

To this end, they have agreed to:

1. encourage the development of alternative methods through co-operation with or participation in national and international initiatives aimed at refining, reducing or replacing the use of animals;
2. seek to influence international harmonisation initiatives to ensure that policies and practices take full account of the ethical duty to protect the welfare and minimise the numbers of animals used in safety assessments;
3. alert applicants/clients to instances where data submitted in support of registration on safety evaluation are considered excessive in terms of animal suffering or numbers, or where internationally accepted alternatives replacing, reducing or refining animal use have not been employed;
4. accept for assessment internationally recognised, non-animal alternative tests conducted to appropriate standards; and
5. not require repetition of data produced by the applicant for other safety evaluation agencies where such data accord with internationally accepted guidelines and have been generated in compliance with appropriate standards.

A further meeting will take place later this month between Home Office officials and the regulators to discuss the progress made in implementing these principles and in promoting them to overseas regulators.

Firearms

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. Desmond Tallent of Hurlingham Road, Stafford will receive the balance of his compensation for the handguns he surrendered last year. [38413]

Mr. Michael: The Firearms Compensation Section is at present concentrating its efforts on clearing the remaining claims received under Options A and B of the compensation scheme, and this work is expected to be completed by about the end of May. The balance of the compensation due to Mr. Tallent under Option C of the scheme should be paid soon after that.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for the most recent year for which figures are available, broken down by month, the numbers of unlicensed firearms entering the United Kingdom, excluding the Province of Northern Ireland; [39038]

(2) how many unlicensed firearms he estimates are in current circulation in the United Kingdom, excluding the Province of Northern Ireland. [39037]

Mr. Michael: There is no reliable estimate of the number of illegal firearms in circulation, or of those entering the United Kingdom and escaping detection.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases to date have been brought against Her Majesty's Government in respect of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, in *(a)* the European Court of Justice and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights. [39036]

Mr. Michael: Although the Government have had no formal notification of any case arising from the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, lodged either with the European Court of Justice or the European Court of Human Rights, we have had sight of two applications to the latter Court.

Small Claims

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in (i) the last year and (ii) the previous five years small claims court hearings have taken place in HM prisons. [38589]

Ms Quin: Small claims hearings are known to have been held in five prisons. These have occurred infrequently and not all the prisons involved have maintained separate records of the hearings.

Four hearings have been confirmed as having been held in the last year and three in the previous five years.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the circumstances leading up to the holding of a small claims court hearing in HM Prison Long Lartin; and what was the total cost to public funds of the hearing. [38590]

Ms Quin: Three small claims courts have been convened at Long Lartin prison over the last year in order to hear a total of ten cases brought by prisoners. Most, but not all, cases are brought against the prison mainly for property-related issues. Prisoners have the same rights as any citizen to make applications to the court and, whilst hearings such as this are not frequent occurrences, neither are they unusual.

Holding hearings within the prison, rather than at the county court, is both more secure and reduces significantly the overall costs by removing the need for the involvement of expensive police and prison escorts. Wherever possible, the court will schedule different cases from the prison to be heard on the same day in order to reduce costs further.

Records are not kept of the cost of convening small claims courts at Long Lartin prison and cannot be estimated with any accuracy.

Civil Justice (Prisoner Access)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on access to civil justice for prisoners serving custodial sentences when the matters in dispute relate to the Prison Service. [38588]

Ms Quin: A prisoner who seeks access to civil justice in a dispute relating to the Prison Service is treated in exactly the same manner as a prisoner who seeks such access in any other dispute. Prisoners' rights in this respect are set out in Rules 37 and 37A of the Prison Rules 1964 (as amended) and Rules 13 and 14 of the Young Offender Institution Rules 1988 (as amended). Guidance on the implementation of these Rules is given to governors in Standing Order 5. Copies of all these documents are available in the Library.

Police Funding

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the capital allocations to police authorities *(a)* for 1998–99 and *(b)* for 1997–98 indicating the percentage change between the two years in ranking order of percentage change. [38540]

Mr. Michael: The information available is in the table. The percentage difference between the two years has been calculated on the minor works capital allocations only. These are allocated by formula. The major capital allocations are made to individual building projects and reflect individual building timetables and are not directly comparable.

	A *Police capital 1998/99 (£ million)*			*B* *Police capital 1997/98 (£ million)*			*Percentage difference*
	Major	*Minor*	*Total*	*Major*	*Minor*	*Total*	*A over B Minor*
Avon & Somerset	0.750	2.321	3.071	0.650	2.417	3.067	-4
Bedfordshire	0.620	0.891	1.511	1.729	0.928	2.657	-4
Cambridgeshire	0.000	0.958	0.958	0.519	0.998	1.517	-4
Cheshire	0.050	1.465	1.515	0.650	1.525	2.175	-4
City of London	0.000	0.642	0.642	0.000	0.668	0.668	-4
Cleveland	0.000	1.127	1.127	0.000	1.174	1.174	-4
Cumbria	0.877	0.891	1.768	0.000	0.928	0.928	-4
Derbyshire	3.750	1.398	5.148	1.300	1.456	2.756	-4
Devon & Cornwall	2.188	2.238	4.426	1.039	2.330	3.369	-4
Dorset	3.115	0.983	4.098	0.041	1.024	1.065	-4
Durham	1.258	1.051	2.309	0.000	1.094	1.094	-4
Dyfed Powys	0.000	0.727	0.727	0.000	0.757	0.757	-4
Essex	0.160	2.266	2.426	1.170	2.359	3.529	-4
Gloucestershire	0.000	1.019	1.019	0.000	1.061	1.061	-4
Greater Manchester	0.133	5.312	5.445	3.797	5.531	9.328	-4
Gwent	0.060	0.931	0.991	0.000	0.969	0.969	-4
Hampshire	1.109	2.545	3.654	0.419	2.650	3.069	-4
Hertfordshire	1.160	1.321	2.481	0.671	1.376	2.047	-4
Humberside	2.931	1.538	4.469	2.577	1.601	4.178	-4
Kent	2.000	2.436	4.436	4.780	2.537	7.317	-4
Lancashire	0.011	2.436	2.447	0.022	2.537	2.559	-4
Leicestershire	0.000	1.490	1.490	0.120	1.552	1.672	-4
Lincolnshire	0.100	1.058	1.158	1.058	1.102	2.160	-4
Merseyside	1.000	3.532	4.532	3.600	3.678	7.278	-4
Metropolitan Police	19.600	23.325	42.925	24.288	24.288	48.576	-4
Norfolk	3.007	1.103	4.110	4.200	1.149	5.349	-4
Northamptonshire	0.775	0.955	1.730	1.430	0.994	2.424	-4
Northumbria	6.430	2.754	9.184	6.643	2.868	9.511	-4

	A Police capital 1998/99 (£ million)			B Police capital 1997/98 (£ million)			Percentage difference A over B
	Major	Minor	Total	Major	Minor	Total	Minor
North Wales	1.210	1.033	2.243	0.488	1.076	1.564	–4
North Yorkshire	3.625	1.065	4.690	1.786	1.109	2.895	–4
Nottinghamshire	2.725	1.766	4.491	3.323	1.839	5.162	–4
South Wales	2.350	2.225	4.575	3.642	2.317	5.959	–4
South Yorkshire	1.530	2.309	3.839	3.165	2.404	5.569	–4
Staffordshire	3.985	1.662	5.647	2.920	1.731	4.651	–4
Suffolk	0.000	0.929	0.929	0.000	0.967	0.967	–4
Surrey	0.190	1.842	2.032	2.109	1.918	4.027	–4
Sussex	1.503	2.279	3.782	2.914	2.373	5.287	–4
Thames Valley	1.708	2.973	4.681	3.130	3.096	6.226	–4
Warwickshire	0.011	0.768	0.779	0.500	0.800	1.300	–4
West Mercia	0.173	1.852	2.025	2.530	1.928	4.458	–4
West Midlands	2.300	5.263	7.563	2.810	5.480	8.290	–4
West Yorkshire	0.319	3.974	4.293	1.901	4.138	6.039	–4
Wiltshire	0.582	0.904	1.486	1.081	0.941	2.022	–4
Total	73,295	99,557	172,852	93,002	103,668	196,670	–4

UK Detention Services

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts there are currently between his Department and UK Detention Services; what was the starting date of each contract; what is the completion date for each contract; and if he will make a statement. [38665]

Ms Quin: The Home Office currently has one contract with the United Kingdom Detention Services which was placed by the Prison Service and is for the management of Blakenhurst Prison. The contract commenced on 26 May 1993 and was initially to run for five years, but has since been extended until 25 May 2001 as announced in a reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) on 19 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *247–49*.

False Passport Offences

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals were arrested and charged with false passport offences during 1997; how many of those were subsequently imprisoned; what was the average length of sentence; how many were subsequently detained on completion of their sentence; and if he will make a statement. [38660]

Mr. Michael: Under section 26(1)(d) of the Immigration Act 1971 a foreign national shall be guilty of a criminal offence if, without lawful authority, he alters any certificate of entitlement, entry clearance, work permit or other document made under or for the purpose of the Act; or has in his possession any passport, certificate of entitlement, entry clearance, work permit or other document which is known or he has reasonable cause to believe to be false.

Detailed information on arrests and charges by offence is not collected centrally. Information held on the Home Office Court Proceedings database for 1996 (latest available) shows nine prosecutions and five convictions under section 26(1)(d) of the Act. Only one offender was given a custodial sentence (of one month—although this was not coupled with a recommendation for deportation). However it is also possible that other legislation, which does not refer exclusively to passports, may be used to deal with foreign nationals arrested for this type of crime.

Bridgend and Fazakerley Prisons

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the public sector comparator against which the Prison Service has calculated the costs of the prisons built and managed under the private finance initiative at Bridgend and Fazakerley; what assumptions are used by the comparator; at what stage it was calculated; and if he will make a statement. [38661]

Ms Quin: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *367–68*.

Television Licence Fines

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women received a custodial sentence for non-payment of a fine imposed for not paying for a television licence, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [38746]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table. Information on fine defaulters, by offence, is published in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (Table 7.3 of the 1996 edition, Cm 3732), a copy of which is in the Library.

Receptions of fine defaulters into prisons in England and Wales: non-payment of fine after conviction for using a TV without a licence, 1995 to 1997, by gender

Year	Males	Females	Total
1995	493	235	728
1996	238	89	327
1997[1]	171	61	232

[1] Provisional

Gaming Industry

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the

effectiveness of the Gaming Act 1968 in controlling the gaming industry, with regard to the use of technology introduced since 1993; [38784]

(2) if he will order a review of the gaming and lottery industry; [38785]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976 in achieving its purpose of keeping lotteries crime free. [38782]

Mr. George Howarth: The present controls meet their primary purpose of keeping gaming crime-free, though the Government are aware of calls to modernise them. We have not ruled that out, but would need to consider the timing, scope and resource implications of such an exercise.

We have no plans to order a review of the gaming and lottery industry as a separate exercise.

Police (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will update the advice to police authorities and chief constables on recruiting a multi-racial police service; and if he will publish it. [39170]

Mr. Michael: The Inspectorate's thematic inspection report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspectorate of Constabulary "Winning the Race. Policing Plural Communities" which was published in October 1997 (copies of which are in the Library), includes "a guide to assist forces in the area of ethnic minority recruitment" which should provide a helpful checklist of action for forces to take. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that he expects each police force in England and Wales to consider the conclusions of the report and to act on its findings during the course of 1998. Later this year chief constables will be asked to report on action taken.

No specific advice is issued to police authorities and chief constables on recruiting a multi-racial police service but it is the responsibility of chief officers of police forces in England and Wales, with the assistance of their police authorities, to ensure that their forces represent the communities they serve. Each chief officer is responsible for the recruitment of officers to his or her force, including initiatives to encourage greater numbers of people from ethnic minorities to join. Home Office police recruitment literature expresses the total commitment to create a police service which reflects the diversity of Britain's population in the late 1990s.

Postal Votes

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the practice of general practitioners charging their patients to verify an application for a postal vote. [38930]

Mr. George Howarth: Under their terms of service, General Practitioners are required to issue certain certificates to their patients free of charge. These include attestations for an absent vote on grounds of physical incapacity.

If a patient is charged a fee for this service, and is unable to resolve the matter with the doctor concerned, the local Health Authority has the power to investigate such complaints and take appropriate action.

Family Passports (Abolition)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what forecast he has made of the likely increase in revenue over each of the next five years as a result of the abolition of the family passport. [38793]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The United Kingdom Passport Agency estimate that the requirement for all under 16 year olds to have their own passports from 5 October this year will increase revenue by £4.4 million in each of the next five years. This additional revenue will be required to recover fully the Agency's costs in providing an extra 400,000 passports each year to children under 16. Under Treasury rules the Passport Agency is required to recover fully its costs.

Liverpool Nationality Directorate

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to reduce the backlog on immigration nationality work at the Liverpool Nationality Directorate; [38982]

(2) what plans he has to change the nature of the work undertaken at the IND in Liverpool; [38653]

(3) what plans he has for the staffing of the IND at Liverpool for 1999–2000. [38663]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have no plans at present to change the nature of the work undertaken by the Nationality Directorate in Liverpool. The computerisation of the casework process, which is being introduced into the Immigration and Nationality Directorate later this year, would allow eventually for some additional non-nationality work to be undertaken in Liverpool, but the staff there would need to be trained to process such work and we have no plans for this at present. The immediate goal is to reduce the present backlog of nationality applications awaiting determination. Recent organisational and procedural changes should help to reduce the number of outstanding applications.

The plans for 1999–2000 have not yet been settled.

Prisoners

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average number of prisoners held per prison in England and Wales. [39161]

Ms Quin: Information on the average prison population for each prison in England and Wales during 1997 is given in the table.

Average prison population in England and Wales during 1997, by individual prison

Establishment	*Average occupancy*
Acklington	652
Albany	429
Aldington	136
Altcourse'	256
Ashwell	448
Askham Grange	128
Aylesbury	302
Bedford	376
Belmarsh	865
Birmingham	1,034
Blakenhurst	779

Average prison population in England and Wales during 1997, by individual prison

Establishment	*Average occupancy*
Blantyre House	119
Blundeston	408
Brinsford	519
Bristol	579
Brixton	611
Brockhill	136
Buckley Hall	365
Bullingdon	688
Bullwood Hall	128
Camp Hill	491
Canterbury	275
Cardiff	708
Castington	309
Channings Wood	607
Chelmsford	464
Colchester[1]	32
Coldingley	295
Cookham Wood	146
Dartmoor	612
Deerbolt	425
Doncaster	1,043
Dorchester	231
Dover	305
Downview	325
Drake Hall	265
Durham	928
East Sutton Park	95
Eastwood Park	128
Elmley	785
Erlestoke	297
Everthorpe	459
Exeter	460
Featherstone	596
Feltham	894
Ford	452
Foston Hall[1]	121
Frankland	449
Full Sutton	455
Garth	587
Gartree	363
Glen Parva	878
Gloucester	277
Grendon	426
Guy's Marsh	340
Haslar	136
Hatfield	151
Haverigg	550
Hewell Grange	196
High Down	697
Highpoint	673
Hindley	537
Hollesley Bay	423
Holloway	527
Holme House	837
Hull	505
Huntercombe	259
Kingston	113
Kirkham	664
Kirklevington	157
Lancaster	216
Lancaster Farms	515
Latchmere House	176
Leeds	936
Leicester	344
Lewes	449
Leyhill	400
Lincoln	634
Lindholme	678
Littlehey	631
Liverpool	1,411
Long Lartin	382
Low Newton	294
Maidstone	556
Manchester	1,072
Moorland	660
Morton Hall	196
New Hall	298
North Sea Camp	198
Northallerton	277
Norwich	715
Nottingham	345
Onley	549
Parc[1]	245
Parkhurst	333
Pentonville	910
Portland	535
Preston	600
Ranby	547
Reading	229
Risley	857
Rochester	398
Send	199
Shepton Mallet	214
Shrewsbury	321
Stafford	622
Standford Hill	345
Stocken	454
Stoke Heath	375
Styal	264
Sudbury	487
Swaleside	567
Swansea	342
Swinfen Hall	202
The Mount	621
The Verne	570
The Wolds	397
Thorn Cross	238
Usk	284
Wakefield	608
Wandsworth	871
Wayland	633
Wealstun	581
Weare[1]	364
Wellingborough	318
Werrington	139
Wetherby	234
Whatton	226
Whitemoor	518
Winchester	601
Woodhill	678
Wormwood Scrubs	1,295
Wymott	797
1997 average	61,114

[1] For those new establishment which opened during 1997, the population figures as at 31 December 1997 have been quoted.

Crime and Unemployment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between the levels of crime and the levels of unemployment over the last 17 years. [39035]

Mr. Michael: The following research studies which have been commissioned by the Home Office since 1981 bear directly on the relationship between crime and unemployment:

Field, S. (1990) Trends in Crime and their Interpretation. Home Office Research Study No. 119.

Field, S. (1998) Trends in Crime revisited. London: Home Office.

Graham, J. and Bowling, B. (1995) Young People and Crime. Home Office Research Study No. 145.

Home Office. (1983) Unemployment, Crime and Sentencing: Some Time Series and Cross Sectional Studies for England and Wales. An unpublished Home Office report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Orme, J. (1994) A Study of the Relationship between Unemployment and Recorded Crime. Home Office Statistical Findings 1/94.

Tarling, R. (1982) Unemployment and Crime. Home Office Research Bulletin 14.

A large amount of research bearing directly or indirectly on the link between crime and unemployment has been evaluated. The key studies examined include:

Association of Chief Officers of Probation (1993) Social Circumstances of Younger Offenders under Supervision. A research report by Gill Stewart and John Stewart, Lancaster University.

Belknap, J. (1989) "The Economics—Crime Link" Criminal Justice Abstracts 21, 1, pp. 140–157.

Dickinson, D. (1994) Crime and Unemployment. Unpublished paper. Cambridge University.

Farrington, D. P., Gallagher, B., Morley, L., St. Ledger, R. J., and West, D. J. (1986) "Unemployment, School Leaving, and Crime" British Journal of Criminology Vol. 26, 4, pp. 335–356.

Hale, C. (1998a) "Crime and the Business Cycle in Post-War Britain Revisited" British Journal of Criminology, forthcoming. (First issued as The Structural and Cultural Determinants of Crime and Punishment, Working Paper No. 3, 1997.)

Hale, C. (1998b) "The Labour Market and Post-War Crime Trends in England and Wales", forthcoming, in Carlen, P. and Morgan, R. (eds) Crime Unlimited: Questions for the 21st century. London: Macmillan. (First issued as The Structural and Cultural Determinants of Crime and Punishment Working Paper No. 4, 1997.)

Pyle, D. J. and Deadman, D. F. (1994) "Crime and the Business Cycle in Post-War Britain". British Journal of Criminology, 34, 339–357.

Reilly, B. and Witt, R. Crime Deterrence and Unemployment in England and Wales: an empirical analysis. University of Sussex Discussion Papers in Economics, paper 12/92.

Walmsley, R., Howard, L., and White, S. (1992) The National Prison Survey 1991. Main findings. Home Office Research Study 128. London: HMSO.

Abandoned Cars

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory authority is provided to what bodies and under what circumstances to tow away abandoned cars. [38745]

Mr. Michael: The legislative provisions governing the removal of vehicles are contained in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 and the Disposal of Vehicle Regulations 1986. Under the 1986 Regulations, the police have powers to remove vehicles abandoned without lawful authority which are left in breach of local traffic regulation orders or left where they are causing an obstruction or likely to cause a danger.

Where vehicles are not illegally parked but otherwise appear to be abandoned, the responsibility for removing and ultimately disposing of them rests with local authorities. They have a duty under the 1978 Act to remove any vehicle abandoned on the highway without legal authority and must follow the procedures laid down in the 1986 Regulations before doing so.

The Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986 provides that seven days' prior notice must be given of a local authority's intention to remove such a vehicle which, in their opinion, is in such a condition that it ought to be destroyed. However, a 21 days' notice period must be given where an abandoned vehicle does not appear to be in a condition meriting its destruction. These safeguards are intended to protect owners against a local authority prematurely assuming a vehicle is abandoned and having it towed away for scrap. They also ensure that local authorities do not have to go through the unnecessary procedure of removing and storing vehicles that may not have been abandoned.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each *(a)* county council, *(b)* metropolitan district council, *(c)* unitary authority and *(d)* London borough council, the total amount of grant aid given to such authorities for emergency planning in each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and provision for 1998–99. [39155]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is given in the tables.

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

County Councils	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99 Provision*
Avon[1]	224,000	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	196,000	196,000	152,950	146,856
Berkshire[1]	224,000	224,000	212,800	0
Buckinghamshire	210,000	210,000	166,250	159,600
Cambridgeshire	224,000	224,000	212,800	205,688
Cheshire	252,000	252,000	239,000	162,624
Cleveland[1]	196,000	0	0	0
Cornwall	238,000	238,000	226,100	217,056
Cumbria	224,000	224,000	212,800	204,288
Derbyshire	266,000	266,000	252,700	245,672
Devon	280,000	280,000	266,000	188,160
Dorset	252,000	252,000	172,900	165,984
Durham	252,000	252,000	239,400	232,904
East Sussex	238,000	238,000	192,850	185,136
Essex	336,000	336,000	319,200	239,232
Gloucestershire	224,000	224,000	212,800	204,288
Hampshire	322,000	322,000	272,650	263,424
Hereford and Worcester[1]	266,000	266,000	252,700	0
Hertfordshire	280,000	280,000	266,000	255,360
Humberside[1]	266,000	0	0	0
Kent	336,000	336,000	319,200	272,832
Lancashire	336,000	336,000	319,200	309,232
Leicestershire	266,000	266,000	219,450	213,752

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

County Councils	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Lincolnshire	238,000	238,000	203,490	195,350
Norfolk	238,000	238,000	226,100	217,056
Northamptonshire	238,000	238,000	226,100	217,056
Northumberland	224,000	224,000	212,800	204,288
North Yorkshire	252,000	196,600	186,770	179,299
Nottinghamshire	252,000	252,000	239,400	196,224
Oxfordshire	210,000	210,000	199,500	191,520
Shropshire	224,000	224,000	212,800	170,688
Somerset	210,000	210,000	199,500	191,518
Staffordshire	266,000	266,000	252,700	245,672
Suffolk	238,000	238,000	226,100	217,056
Surrey	294,000	294,000	279,300	268,128
Warwickshire	210,000	210,000	199,500	191,250
West Sussex	238,000	238,000	226,100	217,056
Wiltshire	210,000	210,000	166,250	159,600
Worcestershire	0	0	0	243,992

[1] County abolished following Local Government reorganisation.

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

Metropolitan District Councils	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Bradford	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Calderdale	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Kirklees	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Leeds	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Wakefield	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Birmingham	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Coventry	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Dudley	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Sandwell	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,500
Solihull	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Walsall	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Wolverhampton	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Barnsley	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Doncaster	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Rotherham	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Sheffield[1]	*	*	*	35,000
Bolton	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Bury	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Manchester	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Oldham	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Rochdale	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Salford[2]	*	35,000	35,000	35,000
Stockport[2]	*	*	*	*
Tameside These authorities transfer their allocations to	*	35,000	35,000	35,000
Trafford	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Wigan[2]	*	35,000	35,000	35,000

*These authorities transfer their allocations to:
[1] South Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority
[2] Greater Manchester Fire and Civil Defence Authority
Metropolitan Districts in Merseyside and in Tyne and Wear transfer their allocations to the appropriate Fire and Civil Defence Authority.

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

English Unitary Authorities	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Bath and North East Somerset	0	56,000	53,200	51,072
Blackburn[1] *	0	0	0	*
Blackpool[1] *	0	0	0	*
Bournemouth	0	0	35,000	35,000
Bracknell Forest	0	0	0	35,000
Brighton and Hove	0	35,000	35,000	35,000
Bristol	0	56,000	53,200	51,072
Darlington[2] *	0	0	*	*
Derby[3] *	0	0	*	*

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

English Unitary Authorities	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Halton	0	0	0	35,000
Hereford[4] *	0	0	0	*
Leicester City	0	0	35,000	35,000
Luton	0	0	35,000	35,000
Medway	0	0	0	35,000
Milton Keynes	0	0	35,000	35,000
North Somerset	0	56,000	53,200	51,072
Nottingham City	0	0	0	35,000
Peterborough[5] *	0	0	0	*
Plymouth	0	0	0	35,000
Poole	0	0	35,000	35,000
Portsmouth[6] *	0	0	*	*
Reading	0	0	0	35,000
Rutland[7] *	0	0	*	0
Slough	0	0	0	35,000
Southampton	0	0	35,000	35,000
Southend	0	0	0	35,000
South Gloucester	0	56,000	53,200	51,072
Stoke[8] *	0	0	*	*
Swindon	0	0	35,000	35,000
Thurrock	0	0	0	35,000
Torbay	0	0	0	35,000
Warrington	0	0	0	35,000
West Berkshire	0	0	0	35,000
Windsor and Maidenhead	0	0	0	35,000
Wokingham	0	0	0	35,000
Wrekin	0	0	0	35,000
York Council	0	55,400	52,630	50,525
East Riding of Yorkshire[9]	0	266,000	244,700	242,592
Hartlepool[10]	0	196,000	186,160	178,714
Isle of Wight	0	168,000	159,600	153,216

* These authorities have or had joint arrangements with:
[1] Lancashire
[2] Durham
[3] Derbyshire
[4] Worcestershire
[5] Cambridgeshire
[6] Hampshire
[7] Leicestershire
[8] Staffordshire
[9] The East Riding of Yorkshire is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Hull, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire.
[10] Hartlepool is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton.

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

Welsh Unitary Authorities	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Carmarthenshire[1]	0	204,000	212,800	204,288
Clwyd	224,000	0	0	0
Conwy	0	62,000	58,900	58,644
County of Gwynedd	0	62,000	58,900	58,644
Denbighshire	0	70,000	66,500	63,840
Dyfed	224,000	0	0	0
Flintshire	0	70,000	66,500	63,840
Gwent	210,000	0	0	0
Gwynedd	210,000	0	0	0
Isle of Anglesey	0	100,000	95,000	87,000
Mid Glamorgan	224,000	0	0	0
Newport[2]	0	224,000	212,800	204,288
Powys	182,000	0	0	0
Rhondda Cynon Taff[3]	0	186,000	186,200	178,752
South Glamorgan	168,000	0	0	0
Swansea[4]	0	210,000	199,500	191,520

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

Welsh Unitary Authorities	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Vale of Glamorgan[5]	0	168,000	159,600	153,216
West Glamorgan	196,000	0	0	0
Wrexham	0	70,000	66,500	63,840

[1] Carmarthenshire is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

[2] Newport is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Blaneau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire and Torfaen.

[3] Rhondda Cynon Taff is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Merthyr Tydfil.

[4] Swansea is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot.

[5] Vale of Glamorgan is the lead authority in joint arrangements with Cardiff.

Civil Defence grant allocations

£

London Borough Councils	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 Provision
Barking	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Barnet	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Bexley	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Brent	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Bromley	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Camden	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Corporation of London	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Croydon	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Ealing	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Enfield	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Greenwich	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Hackney	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Hammersmith	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Haringey	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Harrow	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Havering	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Hillingdon	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Hounslow	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Islington	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Kensington	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Kingston	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Lambeth	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Lewisham	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Merton	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Newham	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Redbridge	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Richmond	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Southwark	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Sutton	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Tower Hamlets	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Waltham Forest	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Wandsworth	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Westminster	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his Department's capital expenditure on emergency planning activities in 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and provision for 1998–99 including capital grants to other bodies; and if he will make a statement about the purpose of the expenditure. [39158]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is set out in the table. The capital expenditure has been incurred to meet necessary infrastructure improvements at the Emergency Planning College. The Home Office pays capital grant to the BBC for the development of a national warning system based around radio and television.

Capital expenditure on emergency planning activities

£000

Year	Capital	Capital grant	Total
1995–96	111	639	750
1996–97	120	714	834
1997–98	63	821	884
1998–99 provisional	61	594	655

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* current and *(b)* capital expenditure on the Emergency Planning College in 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and provision for 1998–99. [39157]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is as follows:

Emergency Planning College expenditure

£000

Year	Current	Capital	Total
1995–96	1,916	111	2,027
1996–97	1,537	120	1,657
1997–98	1,386	63	1,449
1998–99 provisional	1,534	61	1,595

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his Department's current expenditure on Home Office emergency planning activities, excluding any costs related to the Emergency Planning College in 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and provision for 1998–99 under the following headings *(a)* personnel and staffing costs, *(b)* premises costs, *(c)* telecommunications costs, *(d)* equipment storage and maintenance costs, *(e)* publicity and publications costs and *(f)* other costs. [39156]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is as follows:

Current expenditure on Home Office emergency planning activities excluding the Emergency Planning College

£000

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99 provision
(a) Personnel and staffing	1,405	1,398	1,408	1,551
(b) Premises	1,130	882	94	0
(c) Telecommunications	7,586	8,341	4,963	4,630
(d) Equipment storage and maintenance	2,203	2,300	1,709	1,942
(e) Publicity and publications	84	110	20	60
(f) Other	5,592	6,969	6,806	6,368
Total	18,000	20,000	15,000	13,000

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what income his Department has received in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 and expects

to receive in 1998–99 from the disposal of *(a)* land and property and *(b)* equipment, formerly used or held for emergency planning or civil defence purposes; and if he will make a statement. [39159]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is given in the table. Income from the disposal of land and property relates to the sale of former civil defence premises. Income from the disposal of equipment relates to the sale of surplus vehicles and equipment from the Emergency Fire Service stockpile. The income has been returned to the Consolidated Fund; with the exception that, last year, some receipts were used to fund the reception arrangements, at Heathrow and Gatwick airports, for evacuees from Montserrat.

Income

£000

Year	*Land and property disposal*	*Equipment disposal*	*Total*
1995–96	206	35	241
1996–97	576	11	587
1997–98	107	377	484
1998–99[1]	500	27	527

[1] Provisional

Women's Royal Voluntary Service

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his Department's grants to the Women's Royal Voluntary Service for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and provision for 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [39154]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office has provided grant in aid to the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) since its inception in 1938. The levels of grant for the years in question were as follows:

£

Year	*Amount*
1995–96	6,200,000
1996–97	5,840,000
1997–98	5,548,000
1998–99	5,298,000

With some 120,000 volunteers, WRVS is the largest provider of volunteering opportunities in the United Kingdom. It also remains by far the largest single grant recipient from the Department's main grants programme to voluntary and community organisations. This year it will receive nearly half (46 per cent.) of the total budget available.

Following a review of the organisation, published by the Compass Partnership in 1997, it was agreed that WRVS should become self-financing within ten years. The level of Home Office grant will therefore continue to decline, making it possible for us to implement the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation of 1996 to devote a larger share of our funding to new ventures. The WRVS continues to make great strides in the modernisation of its legal, financial and organisational infrastructure and in the development of its services in this, its diamond jubilee year.

Custodial Sentences (Women)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many women were sentenced to custodial sentences in Wales in 1997 and in each of the previous 10 years; [38947]

(2) how many women have been sentenced to custodial sentences in Wales in the first three months of 1998. [38948]

Mr. Michael: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings database is given in the table for the years 1987 to 1996. Data for 1997 will not be available until this autumn, with 1998 figures becoming available in the autumn of the next year.

Number of females sentenced to immediate custody[1] and under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933[2] by type of offence, 1987–1996

Wales

	Immediate custody[2]				*Sec 53 of CYPOA33[2]*
Year	*Indictable offences*	*Summary non-motoring offences*	*Summary motoring offences*	*All offences*	*Indictable offences*
1987	109	6	3	118	—
1988	126	2	2	130	—
1989	102	6	1	109	—
1990	87	9	3	99	1
1991	74	6	1	81	—
1992	87	8	1	96	—
1993	115	6	5	126	2
1994	134	6	5	145	—
1995	152	8	6	166	1
1996	178	6	8	192	4

[1] Under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 custodial penalties are available from the common minimum age of 15 for both boys and girls (previously the minimum age was 14 for boys and 15 for girls). Immediate custody includes detention in a young offender institution, unsuspended imprisonment and partly suspended imprisonment (before 1 October 1992).

[2] Children convicted at the Crown Court may be sentenced to be detained for up to the adult maximum, including life, under Section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Eddie Gilfoyle

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of Merseyside on *(a)* the disciplinary action against officers involved in the Eddie Gilfoyle case recommended by the Police Complaints Authority, *(b)* the date on which Merseyside Police received the PCA report, *(c)* the date set for disciplinary hearings and *(d)* the reason for the delay. [38831]

Mr. Michael: Two Merseyside police officers have been charged with disciplinary offences of neglect of duty and falsehood arising from allegations about the investigation of the murder of Mr. Gilfoyle's wife. Following an investigation of the allegations by Lancashire Constabulary, supervised by the Police Complaints Authority (PCA), the PCA announced in November 1995 that it had agreed disciplinary charges proposed by the Merseyside Police. Before these charges could be heard, further complaints were received about the case which led to a PCA-supervised investigation by Cheshire Constabulary. The PCA announced in March last year that it had again agreed the force's disciplinary recommendations and the hearings are now due to take place next month. I understand that the force originally planned to hold a hearing in December 1997, but that non-availability of the officers' legal counsel led to further delay. My hon. Friend will be aware of the response made by my right hon. Friend to the report of the Home Affairs Select Committee, which my hon. Friend chairs and we will continue to examine ways of avoiding the unacceptable levels of delay in the police discipline system.

Voter Turnout

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government are taking to increase voter turnout for *(a)* local elections and *(b)* general elections among young people; and if he will make a statement. [38970]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are committed to encouraging greater voter participation at elections at all levels and by all sections of society. This is why the Working Party on Electoral Procedures, which I chair, will be examining ways to improve voter turnout, especially among young people.

Prison Drug Strategy

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the review on prison service drug strategy. [38808]

Mr. George Howarth: The review of the Prison Service Drug Strategy is almost complete. It will be published in the very near future.

Anti-social Behaviour

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of measures to deal with anti-social behaviour to be completed. [38807]

Mr. Michael: A project on the police response to anti-social behaviour is currently being carried out by the Home Office Police Research Group. An initial report is due in early summer, with a follow-up evaluation of how well the police are doing in reducing anti-social behaviour later in the year.

A number of tough new measures to deal with anti-social behaviour are contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill, currently before Parliament and expected to receive Royal Assent this summer. These include Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Child Safety Orders, local child curfews, and statutory crime prevention partnerships between local authorities and the police.

Community Fire Safety

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of community fire safety to be completed. [38806]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) on 5 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *212*. The Government received the report of the Community Fire Safety Task Force last autumn and made arrangements for it to be published on 3 November 1997. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

I announced the Government's response to the Task Force report in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) on 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *177*.

Sex Offenders

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of measures to deal with protection of communities from known sex offenders to be completed. [38818]

Mr. Michael: We are working on a range of measures to protect the public from further offending by convicted sex offenders. We have implemented the automatic life sentence in the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 for second time serious sexual offences. We have implemented the requirement in the Sex Offenders Act 1997 for convicted sex offenders to register with the police. The Crime and Disorder Bill provides for extended supervision of sex offenders by the Probation Service after release from prison, and for the courts to make a sex offender order, breach of which will be punishable by imprisonment. We shall also consider the need for further legislative changes in the context of policy developments in the management of offenders with severe personality disorder.

Civil Protection

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of the future role of local civil protection in England and Wales to be completed. [38829]

Mr. George Howarth: A working document "The future role and funding of local civil protection in England and Wales" was issued in November 1997 as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review in the Home Office.

Her Majesty's Government are considering the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review across all Government Departments. I can confirm that approval has been given for the development of National Standards

for civil protection which local authorities and other primary stakeholders will be consulted upon in due course.

Prison Nursing Services

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of prison nursing services to be completed. [38811]

Ms Quin: The consultation period on the nursing policy paper circulated on 21 October 1997 closed on 20 February 1998. The results of the consultation provided much useful feedback but produced no consensus on the proposals.

The position and role of nurses in the provision of health care to prisoners also forms part of the remit of the Joint Prison Service/National Health Service (NHS) Working Group established last autumn. The Joint Group is tasked to look at the broader question of the organisation of prisoners' health care, including whether the NHS should become the provider. The results of the consultation on the nursing policy paper are helping to inform the deliberations of the Joint Group and are being taken forward in the context of that work.

Firefighters Pension Scheme

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the review on the firefighters pension scheme. [38809]

Mr. George Howarth: The review was published on 31 March. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave that day to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Clark), *Official Report*, columns *466–67*.

Youth Justice

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of Government proposals for youth justice to be completed. [38816]

Mr. Michael: The results of the initial review are reflected in the Crime and Disorder Bill and the White Paper "No More Excuses" (Cm 3809). A considerable amount of work is being undertaken to make the youth justice system effective in preventing offending and reoffending and to prepare for implementation of our proposed reforms. I am pleased to say that the reforms are receiving very positive support and co-operation from the police and from local authorities and other interested parties.

Public Entertainment Licensing

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the review of public entertainment licensing. [38824]

Mr. George Howarth: A deregulation review of public entertainments licensing was undertaken during 1996 by the previous Government. I have not yet had an opportunity to look closely at the issues arising out of that review, but I hope to be able to make my views known within the next few months.

Human Rights Bill

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet lay members of the General Synod of the Church of England to discuss the implications of the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]*. [38928]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had a number of meetings about the implications of the Human Rights Bill for the Churches. These included a full discussion with the Bishop of Ripon and officials of the General Synod on 9 March. My right hon. Friend understands the strength of feeling about this issue but he does not believe that a further meeting with lay members would add significantly to the points that have been made.

Fire Service

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many service firefighters there are in each fire authority; and how many of these are women. [38651]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) on 1 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *58–82*.

Nuclear Smuggling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the agencies in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Union responsible for monitoring, intercepting and prosecuting in respect of incidences of alleged nuclear smuggling. [38733]

Mr. Michael: The agencies which could be involved, in the United Kingdom are: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, the relevant local police force, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Constabulary, the security and intelligence agencies, the Environment Agency, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Directorate of Civil Nuclear Security, the Ministry of Defence Atomic Weapons Establishment and the Crown Prosecution Service, depending on the nature of any incident.

International efforts to prevent or to track and prosecute nuclear smuggling are primarily taken forward in fora with a wider membership than the European Union. All member states of the European Union participate, on a national basis, in the collection and sharing of information on confirmed trafficking incidents through the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Prison Television Services

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons have access to Sky television sports channels for prisoners. [38940]

Ms Quin: There is no readily available information about the number of Prison Service establishments which provide Sky television for prisoners, or which of the available channels they subscribe to. Some prisons

subscribe to satellite sports channels, and allow prisoners access during set periods of association with each other. The costs are not met from public funds but from a prison's general purpose fund: this is derived from prisoners' own contributions from their prison earnings, and from prison shop profits and external donations.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 15 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *285*, and 2 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *516*, when a decision about the future of in-cell television will be made. [38965]

Ms Quin: The review of policy in this area is nearing completion, and we hope to make an announcement shortly.

Ministerial Prison Visits

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have visited since 1 May 1997. [38935]

Ms Quin: Since 1 May 1997, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has visited eight prisons. I have visited twenty seven prisons since 1 May and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Knowsley, North and Sefton East (Mr. Howarth) has visited fourteen. Additionally, my hon. Friend The Minister of State has visited two prisons.

Maidstone Prison

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit Maidstone Prison. [38937]

Ms Quin: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I currently have any plans to visit Maidstone prison.

Learmont Report

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on further implementation of the Learmont report. [38936]

Ms Quin: The Learmont report made 127 recommendations about prison security and the management of the Prison Service. Of these, 112 have been accepted and implemented in full or in part and 13 have been rejected. Decisions remain outstanding on two recommendations (63 and 121) and one part-recommendation (66).

Asylum Applications

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum appeals were still awaiting resolution on *(a)* 1 April 1997 and *(b)* 1 April 1998; [38939]

(2) how many asylum applications were still awaiting resolution on *(a)* 1 April 1997 and *(b)* 1 April 1998. [38938]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information on the number of outstanding cases relates to the position at the end of the month rather than the beginning.

The table shows the number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision, and the number of asylum related appeals awaiting determination at the end of March 1997 and 1998.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and Appeals which are outstanding at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 1998.

	Number of principal applicants	
Year	*Applications outstanding*	*Appeals outstanding*
31 March 1997	54,950	23,215
31 March 1998	50,950	23,760

[1] Figures are provisional and rounded to the nearest five.

The backlog of applications has been cut by almost 4,000, but in some of these cases the applicant has appealed, increasing the number of outstanding appeals. The number of appeals determined by adjudicators increased by 31 per cent. from 15,385 in the year to March 1997 to 22,185 in the year to March 1998.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Focus Groups

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the Head of the Home Civil Service has published guidance *(a)* generally, *(b)* on tendering procedures and *(c)* on publication of the findings to Ministers in respect of qualitative and quantitative research with particular reference to focus groups. [38216]

Dr. David Clark *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* It is for individual Departments to determine their needs for research and focus groups. No specific guidance has been issued. Where tendering is involved, Departments will take account of guidance on procurement policy and practice issued by the Treasury.

Medical Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list Government *(a)* departments and *(b)* agencies which provide private medical insurance to staff. [38650]

Dr. David Clark: It is not Government policy to provide civil servants with medical health insurance, or other benefits in kind, as part of their remuneration package. There is a central rule, set out in the Civil Service Management Code, that civil servants should not normally receive fringe benefits of this kind.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions Provision Group

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the report of the Pensions Provision Group will be published. [39163]

Mr. Denham: To inform our review of pensions, the independent Pension Provision Group have been asked to determine the current level of pension provision in the UK, and likely future trends. The Group's report will bring together in one document an up-to-date analysis of

all forms of pension provision. It will provide an authoritative basis upon which we will be able to shape our plans to ensure that today's and tomorrow's pensioners have a decent income in retirement.

We expect the report to be published soon.

Multiple Sclerosis

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people with multiple sclerosis who are claimants of the higher rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance, and assessed as being *(a)* totally unable to walk, *(b)* virtually unable to walk and *(c)* in a condition where the exertion required to walk would constitute a danger to life or be likely to lead to a serious deterioration in health. [37900]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as set out.

On the basis of a 5 per cent. sample of cases at 30 November 1997, there are around 43,500 recipients of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance whose main disabling condition is multiple sclerosis. Almost half of these are recorded as being unable or virtually unable to walk, but records do not show the grounds for awarding benefit to some claimants who previously received Mobility Allowance.

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of attendance allowance have multiple sclerosis. [37901]

Mr. Denham: The number of claimants of Attendance Allowance who have multiple sclerosis is 4,100. This figure relates to people claiming Attendance Allowance at 30 November 1997 and is for those whose main disabling condition is multiple sclerosis.

Source:
5 per cent. sample.

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who are claimants of disability living allowance are in *(a)* receipt of lifetime awards and *(b)* renewal awards; and how many in each category are people with multiple sclerosis. [37899]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

People in receipt of Disability Living Allowance[1]

Disability[2]	*Life award*	*Fixed term*
All disabilities	1,438,700	516,800
Multiple Sclerosis	41,400	3,600

Notes:
[1] Figures relate to 30 November 1997.
[2] Main disabling condition.
Source:
Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. data.

Lone Parents

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many New Deal advisers for lone parents will be in post on *(a)* 6 April 1998 and *(b)* 1 October 1998; and, of those, how many will be recruited from (i) the Benefits Agency, (ii) the Employment Service and (iii) elsewhere. [38104]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Since July last year, 72 Personal Advisers have delivered the first phase of New Deal for Lone Parents, in eight areas across the country. From 6 April, 48 new advisers, together with 66 managers and support staff, join them to deliver the second phase of New Deal for Lone Parents nationally. The second phase represents the period from 6 April to September when New Deal for Lone Parents is extended to all lone parents making a new or repeat claim for Income Support. As numbers being contacted through the New Deal for Lone Parents, the number of Personal Advisers will also rise throughout this period to more than 330 trained Personal Advisers by the end of June.

Preparation for the third phase of the New Deal for Lone Parents—the introduction of a full national programme available to all lone parents—will see further advisers recruited and trained between July and October. By the end of October more than 800 New Deal for Lone Parents Personal Advisers are expected to be in post.

The Personal Advisers for Phase 1—the prototypes for New Deal for Lone Parents—were recruited from within the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. The Personal Advisers currently working in the Benefits Agency will be offered the chance to transfer to the Employment Service. The majority of Personal Advisers for Phase 2 have been recruited from the Employment Service.

For Phase 3, staff in the Employment Service, Benefits Agency and Child Support Agency will be invited to apply for Personal Adviser posts. The three agencies are currently finalising a framework agreement which will allow this to happen.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents with children aged under five years there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Scotland for each year since 1979; and what are the forecasts for each year up to the year 2000. [39039]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Lone parents with children under five—Great Britain

Year	*000s*
1988/89	420
1989/90	480
1990/91	520
1991/92	550
1992/93	580
1993/94	610
1994/95	620
1995/96	640
1996/97	650
1997/98	660
1998/99	680
1999/2000	690
2000/01	700

Notes:
1. DSS estimates and projections, which are based on data from the General Household Survey and Family Resources Survey.
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of lone parents currently claiming *(a)* income support and *(b)* family credit who have a child aged (i) under 11, (ii) 11 to 15 and (iii) 16 to 18 years. [38647]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Lone parents with two or more children may appear more than once in each column depending on the ages of their children.

Income Support and Family Credit lone parents with a child in the following age bands

Age band	*Income Support*	*Family Credit*
Under 11 years	843,000	252,000
11 to 15 years	334,000	157,000
16 to 18 years	84,000	50,000

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Income Support lone parents are those receiving the lone parent premium.
3. Family Credit lone parents are all single claimants with dependants.
4. Sample size 5 per cent.

Sources:

1. Family Credit Statistics 5 per cent. sample of awards, November 1997.
2. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1997.

Pensions Education Working Group

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the report of the Pensions Education Working Group will be published. [39162]

Mr. Denham: Developing greater financial literacy and economic awareness is crucial if we are to give everyone the confidence to make informed choices and take control of their financial future.

We are currently considering a number of initial recommendations from the Pensions Education Working Group on how awareness of pensions and financial education could be improved. We have asked the Group to continue to develop their work in a number of key areas.

We will be giving details of the Group's findings and the Government's responses in due course.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations she has had with representatives of the insurance industry concerning the treatment of payments under loan protection insurance policies for recipients of job seeker's allowance; what instructions she is issuing to Department of Social Security staff concerning these payments; and if she will make a statement. [38896]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A series of meetings have been held between officials of this Department and representatives of the insurance and banking industries. In addition, there has been continued and close liaison between officials and officials of the Association of British Insurers and the British Bankers' Association. The Chief Adjudication Officer will be issuing guidance to adjudication officers on revised regulations, which are currently under statutory consultation and will be laid before the House shortly. The Benefits Agency also plans to issue a circular bringing the change to the attention of all staff handling Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support claims. Guidance will also be issued to Local Authorities, as the change will also apply to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will provide the figures in table 6 of her latest Departmental report for *(a)* contribution-based JSA, *(b)* income-based JSA and *(c)* income support separately for each client group, and identifying lone parents separately in each case. [38941]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out.

Income Support (IS) claimants by client group

000s

Client group	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996 5.*	*1997–98*
All IS claimants	3,383	3,682	3,804	3,936	4,030	3,972
Pensioners	1,668	1,789	1,776	1,761	1,766	1,714
Long term sick and disabled	493	592	690	773	843	878
Lone parents	978	1,035	1,048	1,066	1,061	1,012
Short term sick and others	245	267	290	337	361	367

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand cases.
2. Lone parents are defined as those receiving the family premium (lone parent) or the lone parent premium. This will exclude some lone parents who receive a premium of a higher value ie pensioner or disabled lone parents.
3. Disabled are defined as those receiving the disability premium.
4. Sample size is 1 per cent. for 1992–93 and 1993–94 and 5 per cent. thereafter.
5. Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance replaced Income Support for the unemployed from October 1996.

Source:

1. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1992 to August 1997.
2. Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1997.

Of the 1,190 thousand recipients of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) as of August 1997, 7,000 were receiving the pensioner premium, 17,000 were receiving the disability premium and 12,000 were receiving the family premium (lone parent).

No information is held on the numbers of lone parents receiving contribution-based JSA. 176,000 people were receiving contribution-based JSA in August 1997.

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision has been made under the Government's welfare-to-work scheme for the transport requirements of people with disabilities when taking up options under the New Deal. [38779]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A major part of the New Deal for Disabled People will be the Personal Adviser pilots, which will operate in 12 areas across Great Britain. The Employment Service's Access to Work scheme will be available to participants: under this scheme disabled people can receive help with transport costs—such as taxi fares—to get to work. In addition local authorities in most parts of the country already offer concessionary fares to disabled people.

The New Deal for 18–24 year olds went nationwide on 6 April and a range of local agreements have been signed with travel operators to enable young people to take advantage of concessionary fares. This will help them get maximum benefit from the New Deal.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *670*, for what reason her Department's family resources survey does not contain reliable information on pensions; and what plans she has to conduct research into the pension scheme membership of individuals at different income levels. [38473]

Mr. Denham: We are aware that information collected in the Family Resources Survey on pensions needs some refinement, due to high levels of non-response and mis-reporting, and we have commissioned research to help us improve the questions on pensions. We will consider plans for research on pension scheme membership of individuals at different income levels at a later date.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 10 March, Ref: 5/3644/27. [38752]

Mr. Denham: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 14 April.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 25 February, regarding a constituent, Ref: 4/3644/25. [38850]

Mr. Denham: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 15 April 1998.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *276–77*, on the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, what is the remit of the research the board has been commissioned to undertake on deafness in children and young adults; and on what date it is expected *(a)* to start and *(b)* to be completed. [38951]

Mr. Denham: The remit of the research is to undertake a study of Disability Living Allowance cases where the main disabling condition is deafness in children and young adults up to age 30. Final details, including the timing, are still to be agreed but work is expected to start following the completion of studies the Board is currently undertaking.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage *(a)* in numbers and *(b)* in value of disability benefits paid to those persons over retirement age. [38998]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Percentage of recipients over State retirement age

	By numbers in receipt	*By value of benefit received*[6]
Attendance Allowance[1]	100	100
Disability Living[1] Allowance	28	28
Invalid Care Allowance[2]	5	5
Severe Disablement[3] Allowance	14	11
Incapacity Benefit[4]	8	8
Disability Working[5] Allowance	0.4	0.4

Notes:
[1] 5 per cent. data, current allowances at 30 November 1997.
[2] 100 per cent. data, current allowances at 31 December 1997.
[3] 1 per cent. data, current beneficiaries at 31 March 1996.
[4] 5 per cent. data, current beneficiaries at 30 November 1997, excluding a small number of clerical cases not held on the Benefits Agency's computer system.
[5] 100 per cent. data, current recipients at 31 October 199.
[6] Based on 1998 Departmental report figures for 1997–98 expected expenditure outturn.
Percentages are given to the nearest whole number except in the case of Disability Working Allowance as this would give a zero figure which was considered misleading.
In the case of Invalid Care Allowance it is the carer receiving benefit who is over State pension age rather than the disabled person receiving care.
Some claimants can receive more than one of the above disability benefits. The overlaps for all of these benefits cannot be estimated and therefore an overall caseload total for claimants in receipt of one or more of them cannot be given.
Source:
DSS Analytical Services Division data.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the purpose of the survey of the income levels of recipients of disability living allowance; and what is the cost of conducting the survey. [38866]

Mr. Denham: There are no plans to carry out a new survey into the income levels of recipients of Disability Living Allowance. Information on the income levels of benefit recipients, along with other data, is already available from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). Information from the 1996–97 FRS and the follow up disability survey has been merged to provide a

comprehensive source of data about the incomes and resources of disabled adults in private households. Results will be published towards the end of 1998.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate her Department has made of the levels of benefit fraud for each benefit, excluding housing benefit, for each year since 1979. [38997]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

The Benefit Review Programme, which began in 1994, was introduced in response to the need for quantitative, statistically valid, information about the extent of fraud and error in Social Security benefits. The table shows the estimated levels of fraud as determined by benefit reviews (excluding Housing Benefit) which have been completed to date. The definition of fraud used to produce the results is currently being evaluated.

The Department has been reviewing its counter fraud strategies, and as part of this work has looked at the whole question of measuring the amount of fraud in the system. We shall be announcing the outcome of this review in due course.

Benefit	*Percentage of cases examined where fraud confirmed or strongly suspected*	*Estimated annual expenditure loss due to fraud (£ million)*	*Year of benefit review*
Income Support (First Review)	9.7	1,409	1994–95
Unemployment Benefit	7.8	86	1994–95
Retirement Pension	up to 0.13	up to 40	1995–96
Invalid Care Allowance	6.5	37	1995–96
Disability Living Allowance	12.2	499	1995–96
Income Support (Second Review)	11.1	1,773	1996–97

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the advertisements taken out *(a)* on poster sites, *(b)* in newspapers, *(c)* on radio and *(d)* on television to publicise the National Benefit Fraud Hotline since 1 May 1997. [39194]

Mr. Denham: The Department currently operates two national fraud hotlines—the National Benefit Fraud Hotline which has continued to run since May 1997, and the Business Anti-Fraud Hotline which was launched in January 1998.

National Benefit Fraud Hotline

An exercise to evaluate the effectiveness of advertising and publicity for the National Benefit Fraud Hotline is currently underway. As part of this exercise, poster sites are being used in Sheffield; Leeds; Carlisle; and Crewe. Local newspaper advertising and/or inserts are being used in Sheffield; Leeds; Wigan and Bolton; Central Lancashire; West Wales; Wrexham; and the North Wales coast. Local radio advertising is being used in Sheffield; Leeds; Hull; Bedford; and Stevenage. No television advertising has been commissioned.

Business Anti-Fraud Hotline

The Business Anti-Fraud Hotline was launched primarily to help address National Insurance evasion. As part of the launch, 59 quarter page advertisements were placed in the national and regional press, and 37 advertisements were placed in the business and trade press of those industries deemed to be at high risk of National Insurance contributions fraud. No advertisements were taken out on poster sites, on radio or on television.

National Insurance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated average extra employer national insurance contribution per employee in respect of employees earning over £450 per week that employers will have to pay as a result of the proposals announced in the Budget. [39192]

Mr. Denham: For employees earning over £450 per week, employers will pay an estimated average of £4.68 per week more in National Insurance contributions as a result of the proposals announced in the Budget. For employers as a whole this will be fully offset by a reduction in employer contributions for the great majority of employees earning below this level.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in which years each of the war pensions for former service personnel who participated in the nuclear tests programmes in Australia and the South Pacific and developed leukaemia, or the widows of such personnel, were awarded. [38648]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Awards of war disablement and war widows pensions

Year of award	*Awards of war disablement pension*	*Awards of war widows pension*
1986	—	1
1988	1	5
1989	2	1
1992	—	1
Total	3	8

Note:

Previously published information incorrectly identified an award of war widows pension as one of war disablement pension. This error has been corrected in the above table.

Welfare Profiles

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list all the welfare profiles being compiled by her Department. [38865]

Mr. Field: We published seven Focus Files on 15 January which drew on information compiled and published by the Department of Social Security.

Focus Groups

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *223–24*, which of the contracts listed was awarded on the basis of a single tender. [39254]

Mr. Field: Three contracts were awarded on the basis of a single tender:

Market Opinion Research International—Attitudes to disability benefits

British Market Research Bureau International Limited—Attitudes towards housing benefits

Alan Hedges—Pensions and Retirement Planning.

The study on Invalidity Benefit and the Contributory Principle, being carried out by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University, forms part of a core-funded programme of work, which was itself competitively tendered.

The following were commissioned using the Central Office of Information's framework agreement with approved suppliers:

Andrew Irving Associates—Counter fraud publicity

One World—New Deal for Lone Parents: development of publicity work

Navigator—Fraud: attitudes to national benefit fraud hotline publicity

Reflexions—Fraud: reporting changes in circumstances

Michael Herbert—Pensions: approaches to information material

Cragg Ross Dawson—New Deal for Lone Parents Newsletter.

All other contracts were awarded following competitive tender exercises.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 April 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Waste Disposal

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what volume of waste was imported for disposal into each local authority area in the North West Region in each of the last three years. [38467]

Angela Eagle: Information relating to transnational shipments of waste into and out of England and Wales is collected on behalf of my Department and the Welsh Office by the Environment Agency; this information is no longer collected by local authorities. The Table shows the latest available statistics on the amount of waste imported into the North West region of the Environment Agency for disposal. This does not include imports relating to recovery or recycling operations.

Year	*Amount imported for disposal (tonnes)*
1995	7,925
1996	[1]11,505

[1] Provisional figure

Diabetes (Drivers)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the relative involvement in injury crashes of drivers (i) known in advance and (ii) discovered afterwards to have diabetes. [39167]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* In 1983, the then Senior Medical Adviser at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency reviewed police-reported accidents, finding that insulin-treated diabetes was responsible for 17 per cent. of 1,600 reported accidents involving collapse at the wheel in which the driver survived. An analysis of 100 of those accident cases revealed that 35 per cent. of the drivers had suffered from altered consciousness and 62 per cent. had suffered from complete loss of consciousness. More recent monitoring by the DVLA of information from the police and other sources revealed on average 10 road traffic incidents involving insulin-treated diabetics per month. In neither study is information available on the proportion of drivers who are discovered to suffer from diabetes after they have been involved in an accident or incident.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the numbers of drivers with diabetes, who *(a)* know and *(b)* do not know that they have the condition. [39168]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency records indicate that some 100,000 drivers have advised that they have insulin-treated diabetes. The Agency has no information on the number of drivers with diabetes who either have failed to advise DVLA of their condition or are unaware of their condition.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those member states which have obtained an exemption for insulin-dependent drivers from the EU Driving Licence Directive. [39032]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Second EC Directive on Driving Licences (91/439/EEC) does not provide for member states to be granted exemption from its requirements in respect of insulin-dependent drivers.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many insulin-dependent diabetics have been informed to date by the DVLA that they can no longer drive Group C and D vehicles; and how many the agency plans to contact before the end of 1998. [39181]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Drivers whose licences are due for renewal are advised of this in advance by the DVLA. Where such drivers are insulin-dependent, they are being advised that they are no longer eligible to drive category C1 and D1 vehicles. Some 16,500 insulin-dependent diabetic holders of such entitlements have already been so advised. A similar number will be contacted before the end of the year.

Abnormal Loads

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with the power generation and transmission industries regarding possible capital contributions by those industries towards the cost of maintaining a strategic highway network to the 45HB standard; [39041]

(2) what representations he has received for heavy industry regarding the ending of the system of designated routes for abnormal loads; [39045]

(3) for what reasons the Highways Authority has ended the system of designated routes for abnormal loads; and what assessment he has made of the current arrangements; [39044]

(4) what is the division of responsibility between his Department, the Highways Agency and appointed contractors for maintaining a network of road routes suitable for abnormal loads; [39043]

(5) what discussions he has held with the power generation and transmission industries regarding the movement of abnormal loads on public roads. [39046]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* My officials have had a number of meetings with representatives of the power generation and transmission industries, who have made representations on the subject of maintaining a network of road routes suitable for abnormal loads. These discussions have touched on a

number of subjects, including current arrangements for meeting the cost of assessment and strengthening work. A further meeting is to take place on 24 April.

My Department is responsible for the policy on the carriage of abnormal loads on roads. The Highways Agency puts this into effect on the motorway and trunk road network in England, and local highway authorities do so on those parts of abnormal load routes lying on local roads. The highway authorities appoint contractors to carry out works on their behalf.

Discussions to date have established that the former designated routes need to be revised because the location of relevant manufacturers, power generation and transmission sites etc. have changed. Also, in some instances, assessments of structures on the network have shown they are no longer capable of carrying the intended loads. The discussions with the industry are intended to identify what arrangements might be appropriate for their current and foreseen needs.

Regional Boundaries

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received regarding boundary changes of the English regions. [39258]

Angela Eagle: In response to our consultation on regional development agencies in England, we received over 1,500 responses. Of the small proportion who commented on the issue of boundaries of the RDAs, the majority supported the Government's decision to base RDA boundaries on the Government Office boundaries, with one RDA covering Merseyside and the North West. Since then, we have received a large number of pro-forma representations seeking a separate regional identity for Cornwall, and a small number of other representations about regional boundaries.

A6 Bypass

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when planning permission was granted for the construction of the PVC spur road onto the A6 Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass; [38977]

(2) what *(a)* legal and *(b)* other obstacles there are to the immediate construction of the PVC spur road onto the A6 Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass; [38974]

(3) if his Department has been asked to provide funding towards the construction of the PVC spur road onto the A6 Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass; [38975]

(4) what source of public funds are available to aid the construction of the PVC spur road onto the A6 Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass. [38976]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tom Levitt, dated 21 April 1998:

The Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the provision by the PVC Group PLC of an access road to their works from the A6 Chapel-en-le-Frith Bypass.

The High Peak Borough Council granted planning permission for the access on 26 February 1997. A condition of the permission, included at the direction of the Secretary of State, is that the access must be completed to DETR design standards. Consultants working for the PVC Group wrote to the Agency on 31 March this year seeking advice on this.

The new access onto the bypass will require works to the trunk road. As with any case of this kind the developer is required to enter into an agreement under Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 to fund work to the trunk road specified in the agreement. The consultants returned to the Agency on 2 April, the standard forms which we had supplied about a year ago to allow preparation of the agreement.

The Agency has not been asked to make any contribution towards the cost of the access. It is to form a private access to and from the Group's re-processing plant and as such cannot be financed from trunk road funds.

M25

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Highways Agency used the same lane capacity calculation for the M25 in respect of the T5 spur road as it used in the proposals for widening the motorway between junctions 12 and 15; and if he will make a statement. [38750]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* When assessing options for trunk road improvements, the Highways Agency takes into account operational requirements, economic costs and benefits and environmental effects.

In the case of the M25 between J12 and J15, the widening proposals were restricted to dual 5 lanes and dual 6 lanes in order to limit the environmental impact.

These road widths were then used in the computer models for assessing both the M25 widening scheme and the T5 Spur Road.

Evidence on these matters has been given to the Inspector at the Terminal 5 Public Inquiry and he will be making his report to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in due course.

Traffic Congestion (A380)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1029, concerning the A380, what evidence underlay his statement that Devon County Council will require at least another two years work before a contract can be signed for a PFI scheme. [38846]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Devon County Council have provided the DETR with documentation supporting their case for the A380 Kingskerswell Bypass as a PFI scheme. In that material, the programme timetable envisages contract signature no earlier than November 2000.

Road Tax

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the additional revenue that will be raised in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01, *(d)* 2001–02 and *(e)* 2002–03 from excluding cars built after 1 January 1973 from the exemption of historic vehicles from road tax. [38717]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The additional revenue is expected to be some £3 million in each of the financial years from 1998–1999. However, the rate of scrapping of vehicles over twenty-five years old is significant and this will largely offset annual growth in the additional revenue.

Building Control Services

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the health and safety standards achieved by private contractors providing building control services. [38742]

Mr. Raynsford: Private contractors providing building control services are required to comply with the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. It places duties on employers to ensure the health and safety of their employees. It also places duties on employers and the self-employed to other persons who might be affected by their work activities. Health and safety legislation is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authorities.

Building control provision is governed by the Building Act 1984 and Regulations made under that Act. Private contractors are required by Regulation 10 of the Building (Approved Inspectors etc.) Regulations 1985 to take such steps as are necessary, within the limits of professional skill and care, to ensure that the Building Regulations 1991 are complied with. These Regulations are primarily concerned with protecting the health and safety of those in and around buildings.

As with local authority building control, the Department currently conducts no formal monitoring of private contractors providing building control services.

Lead Paint

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to publicise the dangers of lead in surfaces in houses painted before 1960 to *(a)* pregnant women, *(b)* carers of young children and *(c)* the general public; and when they will be implemented. [39310]

Angela Eagle: We will shortly be publishing a revised leaflet on lead in paint which is intended to raise awareness of the associated dangers. The leaflet will provide accurate, readily assimilated information on the problems associated with old leaded paint and how to take effective safety measures. The intended audience will be the general public and the leaflet will be made widely available, but we will be discussing with the Department of Health appropriate means of bringing the leaflet to the attention of environmental health and health professionals, as well as providing more detailed information for these groups.

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the representations he has received on the dangers of lead in painted surfaces; and place a copy of the representations in the Library. [39308]

Angela Eagle: In the six months from October 1997, the Department has received seventeen individual representations from Members of Parliament on lead in paint, of which eight were forwarded from other Government Departments. In the same period, the Department received ten private inquiries from members of the public on the same topic.

It would be inappropriate to list these representations or place copies in the Library.

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which organisations he has consulted about publicising and providing information for the public on the risks of lead in old paintwork; and when the consultation will be completed. [39311]

Angela Eagle: The Department's own scientific and communications experts have liaised with other Government Departments, industry representatives and technical and design consultants in the provision of information to the public on the risks associated with lead in old paintwork.

The Department will continue to consult widely on risks from lead in all media, as part of the strategic overview of chemicals in the environment which it is conducting within the wider framework of the sustainable use of chemicals, as announced by the Deputy Prime Minister.

Coastguard Agency

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many responses were received to the HM Coastguard five-year strategy consultation document; [38668]

(2) how many of the responses to the HM Coastguard five-year strategy consultation document expressed opposition to the possible closure of one or more coastguard stations. [38669]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A total of 1,600 copies of the HM Coastguard five-year strategy consultation document were issued. 215 responses were received. Response to the consultation on the Strategy is currently with Ministers for consideration. It would, therefore be inappropriate to release details until Ministers' deliberations are complete. A copy of the relevant document will be placed in the House Library as soon as the way forward is decided.

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1998, *Official Report* column *444*, if he will place in the Library a list of the unclassified papers in the Technical Memoranda series produced by the Chemical Technology Division of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, indicating the title of each paper and the date on which each paper was produced. [38962]

Mr. Spellar: I am today placing a list in the Library of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Quality Management Group at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston was set up;

what is the purpose of this group; how many series of technical papers or reports are currently being produced by this group; and what are the names of each series. [38992]

Mr. Spellar: A quality management group, originally called the Superintendency of Inspection, has existed at the Atomic Weapons Establishment AWE since the 1960s. It is currently part of the Directorate of Quality and Safety Assurance whose function includes the stewardship of the AWE quality system. The Directorate of Quality Assurance maintains the AWE Quality Manual, and supporting documentation. It also produces quality plans, audit programmes, audit reports and quarterly analysis reports.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1998, *Official Report* columns *443–44*, how many reports in the untitled series of papers produced by the Warhead Engineering Division of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston are currently unclassified. [38963]

Mr. Spellar: There are some 140 unclassified reports in the untitled series.

Chemical Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which scientific journals and other open publications staff from the defence microbiology division of the Chemical Defence Establishment (Porton Down) have published papers in 1995 and 1996; and if he will specify the titles of the papers and the date on which the papers appeared. [38605]

Mr. Spellar: During 1995 and 1996, staff from the microbiology section of the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency at Porton Down have published a number of papers in scientific journals and other open literature publications, the details of which are set out.

A new improved sub-unit vaccine for plague: the basis of protection.
FEMS, Immunol Med Microbiol 1995 Dec, VOL: 12(3–4), P:223–30, ISSN: 0928–8244.
Williamson E.D, Eley S.M, Griffin K.F, Green M, Russell P, Leary S.E, Oyston P.C, Easterbrook T, Reddin K.M, Robinson A, et-al.

Doxycycline or ciprofloxacin prohylaxis and therapy against experimental Yersinia pestis infection in mice.
J. Antimicrob Chemother 1996 Apr., VOL: 37 (4), P: 769–74, ISSN: 0305–7453. Russell P, Eley S.M, Bell D.L, Manchee R.J, Titball R.W.

Immunisation with DNA polynucleotides protects mice against lethal challenge with St. Louis encephalitis virus.
Arch. Virol 1996, VOL: 141 (3–4), P: 743–9, ISSN: 0304–8608.
Phillpotts R.J, Venugopal K, Brooks T.

The vaccinia virus 4c and A-type inclusion proteins are specific markers for the intracellular mature virus particle.
J. Virol 1996 Jun, VOL: 70 (6) P:3372–7, ISSN: 0022–538X
Ulaeto D, Grosenbach D, Hruby D.E.

A comparison of Plague vaccine, USP and EV76 vaccine induced protection against Yersinia pestis in a murine model.
Vaccine 1995 Nov, VOL: 13 (16), P:1551–6, ISSN: 0264–410X.
Russell P, Eley S.M, Hibbs S.E, Manchee R.J, Stagg A.J, Titball R.W.

Role of lipopolysaccharide and a major outer membrane protein from Francisella tularensis in the induction of immunity against tularemia.
Vaccine 1995 Sep, Vol: 13 (13), P: 1220–5, ISSN: 0264–410X.
Fulop M, Manchee R, Titball R.

The construction of a reporter system and use for the investigation of Clostridium perfringens gene expression.
FEMS Microbiol Lett 1995 Aug 15, VOL: 131 (1), P: 99–105, ISSN: 0378–1097.
Bullifent H.L, Moir A, Titball R.W.

Nucleotide sequence of the NS5 gene of Banzi virus: comparison with other flaviviruses.
J.Gen Virol 1995 Sep, VOL 76 (Pt 9), P: 2317–21, ISSN: 0022–1317.
Fulop L.D, Barrett A.D, Titball R.W.

Role of two outer membrane antigens in the induction of protective immunity against Francisella tularensis strains of different virulence.
FEMS Immunology and Medical Microbiology, 1996, Vol/Iss/Pg. 13/3 (245–247), ISSN: 0928–8244.
Fulop L, Manchee R, Titball R.

The level of expression of alpha-toxin by different stains of Clostridium perfringens is dependent on differences in promoter structure and genetic background.
Anaerobe 2 (6), 365–371. ISSN: 1075–9964.
Bullifent H.L, Moir A, Awad M.M, Scott P.T, Rood J.I, Titball R.W.

Local and systemic immune response to a microencapsulated sub-unit vaccine for plague.
Vaccine 14 (17–18). 1996. 1613–1619. ISSN: 0264–410X.
Williamson E.D, Sharp G.J.E, Eley S.M, Vesey P.M, Pepper T.C, Titball R.W, Alpar HO.

Evaluation of monoclonal antibodies for generic detection of flaviviruses by ELISA.
Journal of Virological Methods 62 (2). 1996. 143–151. ISSN: 0166–0934.
Brown J.M, Coates D.M, Phillpotts R.J.

Transformation of Burkholderia pseudomallei by electroporation.
Analytical Biochemistry 242 (1). 1996. 73–76. ISSN: 0003–2697.
Mack K, Titball R.W.

Electrospray mass spectrometry for detection and characterization of purified cricket paralysis virus (CrPV).
Rapid Communications in Mass Spectrometry 10 (8). 1996. 937–941. ISSN: 0951–4198.
Despeyroux D, Phillpotts R, Watts P.

An aroA mutant of Yersinia pestis is attenuated in guinea-pigs, but virulent in mice.
Microbiology (Reading) 142 (7). 1996. 1847–1853. ISSN: 1350–0872.
Oyston P.C.F, Russell P, Williamson E.D, Titball R.W.

A rapid, highly sensitive method for the detection of Francisella tularensis in clinical samples using the polymerase chain reaction.
American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene 54 (4). 1996. 364–366 ISSN: 0002–9637.
Fulop M, Leslie D, Titball R.

Attenuated Salmonella typhimurium expressing an F1-V antigen fusion protein protects mice against plague.

96th General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, May 19–23, 1996. Abstracts of the General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology 96 (0). 1996. 193. ISSN: 1060–2011.

Leary S.E.C, Griffin K.F, Williamson E.D, Titball R.W.

Characterisation of monoclonal antibodies raised against various antigens of Yersinia pestis.

96th General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, May 19–23, 1996. Abstracts of the General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology 96 (0). 1996. 193. ISSN: 1060–2011.

Prior J.L, Fulop M.J, Titball R.W, Wren B.W.

Immunogenicity of V antigen fragments of Yersinia pestis.

96th General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, May 19–23, 1996. Abstracts of the General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology 96 (0). 1996. 193. ISSN: 1060–2011.

Hill J, Leary S.E.C, Griffin K.F, Williamson E.D, Titball R.W.

Active immunisation with recombinant V antigen from Yersinia pestis protects mice against plague.

INFECT-IMMUN, 1995, Vol/Iss/Pg. 63/8 (2854–2858), ISSN: 0019–9567.

Leary S.E.C, Williamson E.D, Griffin K.F, Russell P, Eley S.M, Titball R.W.

Expression of Yersinia pestis V antigen in attenuated Salmonella typhimurium: Development of a novel vaccine for plague.

Ravagnan, G. and C. Chiesa (Ed.). Contributions to Microbiology and Immunology, Vol. 13. Yersiniosis: Present and future; 6th International Symposium on Yersinia, Rome, Italy, September 26–28, 1994. xi+340p. S. Karger AG: Basel, Switzerland; New York, New York, USA. ISBN 3–8055–6138–5. 13 (0). 1995. 216–217. ISSN: 0301–3081.

Leary S.E.C, Eley S.M, Williamson E.D, Titball R.W.

Molecular variation between alpha-toxins from the type strain (NCTC 8237) and clinical isolates of Clostridium perfringens associated with disease in man and animals.

Microbiology (Reading) 142 (1). 1996. 191–198. ISSN: 1350–0872.

Ginter A, Williams E.D, Dessy F, Coppe P, Bullifent H, Howells A, Titball R.W.

Stability of airborne microbes and allergens.

Cox, C.S. and C.M. Wathes (Ed.). Bioaerosols handbook. xx+623p. CRC

Press/Lewis Publishers Inc.: Boca Raton, Florida, USA; London, England, UK.

ISBN 0–87371–615–9. 0(0). 1995.77–99.

Cox C.S.

Physical aspects of bioaerosol particles.

Cox, C.S. and C.M. Wathes (Ed.). Bioaerosols handbook. xx+623p.CRC

Press/Lewis Publishers Inc.: Boca Raton, Florida, USA; London, England, UK.

ISBN 0–87371–615–9. 0 (0). 1995. 15–25.

Cox C.S.

Bioaerosols in the environment.

Cox, C.S. and C.M. Wathes (Ed.). Bioaerosols handbook. xx+623p CRC

Press/Lewis Publishers Inc.: Boca Raton, Florida, USA; London, England, UK.

ISBN 0–87371–615–9. 0 (0). 1995. 11–14.

Cox C.S, Wathes C.M.

Bioaerosols handbook.

Cox, C.S. and C.M. Wathes (Ed.). Bioaerosols handbook xx+623p. CRC

Press/Lewis Publishers Inc.: Boca Raton, Florida, USA; London, England, UK.

ISBN 0–87371–615.9 0 (0). 1995 XX+623P.

Cox C.S, Wathes C.M.

Evaluation of the Biolog system for the identification of Bacillus anthracis.

Letters-in-Applied-Microbiology 20 (4). 1995. 209–211. ISSN: 0266–8254.

Baillie L.W.J, Jones M.N, Turnbull P.C.B, Manchee R.J.

Immunisation with live recombinant Salmonella typhimurium aroA producing F1 antigen protects against plague.

Infection and Immunity 63 (2). 1995. 563–568. ISSN: 0019–9567

Oyston P.C.F, Williamson E.D, Leary S.E.C, Eley S.M, Griffin K.F, Titball R.W.

Singapore Air Show

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants who attended the Asian Aerospace 98 air show in Singapore, giving the costs of their attendance along with any other costs incurred by his Department in connection with the air show. [39246]

Mr. Spellar: I attended Asian Aerospace 98 as a guest of the Singaporean Government, who paid all costs associated with my attendance. A further thirty one MOD personnel have been identified as attending. The cost incurred by the Ministry of Defence was some £217,500. This includes costs associated with travel, accommodation, construction of a small stand, general participation and a Royal Navy Lynx participating in the flying display.

It should be noted that overseas orders, which result from the activities of the Defence Export Services Organisation, DESO, including UK participation at such exhibitions, help to reduce the unit cost of equipment procured for the British Armed Forces—conservatively estimated at some £350 million saving per annum. DESO also helps to secure Commercial Exploitation Levies, forecast to be £56 million during the next financial year. The total benefits generated by DESO for the MOD therefore more than cover the total cost of all its operations.

Challenger II

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the export orders obtained for the Challenger II tank to date, indicating the value of (i) each order, (ii) offset commitments entered into as part of each order and (iii) export credits extended to support these orders. [39271]

Mr. Spellar: The value of contracts is a matter for Vickers Defence Systems and its customers. Vickers Defence Systems has, however, publicly stated that it has concluded two export contracts with the Royal Army of Oman for Challenger II in a number of variants; Main Battle Tank, Driver Training Tank and Repair and Recovery Vehicles. The contracts, which included logistics support packages, were valued at £130 million and £100 million.

While there is no contractual commitment to offset, Vickers contributes to the Omani-British Offset Programme.

Export credit guarantees amounting to some 80 per cent. of the value of each contract have been extended or are under consideration by ECGD.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support his Department has provided to Vickers in marketing the Challenger II abroad. [39270]

Mr. Spellar: As part of its normal activities, MOD's Defence Export Services Organisation has supported the sale of Challenger 2 in co-ordination with Vickers. The support has included appropriate provision of advice on the Government's foreign, defence and export control policies, facilitation of, and participation in, discussions with the Omani authorities, including visits and the provision of military, marketing and diplomatic advice.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) What estimate his Department has made of the relative economic benefits of purchasing *(a)* Challenger II and *(b)* the alternative proposed by each of the overseas contenders for the contract taking into account their offset proposals; [39253]

(2) if he will list the final offset proposals indicating the value of offsets proposed (i) in absolute terms and (ii) as a percentage of the contract made by the overseas suppliers who tendered for the contract to replace the Chieftain tank. [39252]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Export Agreements

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been undertaken by his Department on the cost and benefits of offset obligations incurred by UK defence companies as part of export defence agreements. [39251]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence holds no comprehensive record of offset agreements entered into by UK defence companies. While general support and advice is provided, no studies on the cost and benefits of offset obligations incurred by UK defence companies have been undertaken by the MOD.

Saudi Arabia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the offset obligations incurred under the Al Yamamah *(a)* I and *(b)* II agreement with Saudi Arabia, (i) as a percentage of the sales agreed and (ii) in absolute terms. [39248]

Mr. Spellar: The UK Government, in conjunction with British Aerospace, the Al Yamamah Prime Contractor, agreed to establish and develop a non-contractual Economic Offset Programme to promote commercial ventures between British and Saudi investors. The present target for the non-Saudi investment in ventures taken forward under the Al Yamamah Economic Offset Programme is to generate value of at least £1 billion.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the value of the offset obligations which have been met to date under the Al Yamamah *(a)* I and *(b)* II agreement, the individual offset projects agreed and the value of the offsets credited to each project. [39249]

Mr. Spellar: The projects which have been implemented to date under Al Yamamah Offset Programme, and the UK technology partner involved are as follows:

Glaxo Pharmaceutical Factory

Tate & Lyle Sugar Refinery

BP/UOP Cyclar Aromatics Chemical Plants

BAe Training Company

Harco Dispersion Products

Flover Instrument Repair Company.

Offset credits have not yet been negotiated with the Saudi authorities, but the UK estimate of the anticipated total value of the above projects is in the region of £450 million. Work continues to develop and promote further viable projects.

Offset Programme

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offset targets are included in the Omani-British Offset Programme. [39250]

Mr. Spellar: A Memorandum of Understanding, MOU, was signed in 1990 between the Government of Oman and HMG on co-operation in the field of defence equipment and related services. Under the MOU, both parties agreed to work to encourage and identify viable opportunities for Offset for designated defence contracts. Offset in this context covers any form of new industrial or economic activity introduced for the benefit of Oman through the direct or indirect involvement of designated UK contractors.

A Joint Oman/Uk Offset Steering Group, JOSG, oversees the programme. It has identified 'priority areas' for investment, procedures, and pro-active roles to be taken by both the British and Omani Offset Secretariats. All proposed projects are considered by the JOSG and, if agreed, registered under the Offset Programme. Specific details of the projects registered are confidential between the Governments of the UK and Oman under Exemptions 1 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Football-related Arrests

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the total number of football-related arrests in each of the past five football seasons, broken down according to *(a)* Premier League, *(b)* League Division One, *(c)* League Division Two and *(d)* League Division Three football matches; [39009]

(2) if he will list the total number of people arrested in connection with a football match who were subsequently convicted of a violent crime in each of the last five football seasons. [39010]

Mr. Michael: The following figures, provided by the Football Intelligence Unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, summarise the statistics on numbers of arrests for football-related offences and attendances at Premier and League matches for each of the relevant seasons.

	Arrests	*Attendance (millions)*
Season 1992–93		
Premier league	1,647	9.8
Division one	1,347	5.9
Division two	1,081	3.5
Division three	513	1.5
Total	4,588	20.7
Season 1993–94		
Premier league	1,630	10.6
Division one	1,359	6.5
Division two	782	3.0
Division three	456	1.6
Total	4,227	21.7
Season 1994–95		
Premier league	1,713	11.2
Division one	1,227	6.0
Division two	674	3.0
Division three	226	1.6
Total	3,840	21.8
Season 1995–96		
Premier league	1,697	10.5
Division one	945	6.6
Division two	506	2.8
Division three	289	2.00
Total	3,437	21.9
Season 1996–97		
Premier league	1,759	10.8
Division one	891	6.9
Division two	626	3.2
Division three	301	1.9
Total	3,577	22.8

These figures do not include cup competitions and play-off matches. Records are not kept centrally of how many of those arrested were subsequently convicted of specific offences.

Witness Support Schemes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance his Department gives to witness support schemes at court centres. [37654]

Mr. Michael: The latest available information is for 1996–97. In that year, some £1.6 million of the total Home Office grant of £11.7 million to Victim Support was used by them to run a witness support service at every Crown Court centre in England and Wales. There are 86 such services, including satellite courts. In 1996–97, the grant enabled 92 paid staff and 1,100 volunteers to provide help to 97,618 people.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from interested parties and individuals about the need to establish a Royal Commission on the use of animals for experimental purposes. [38630]

Mr. George Howarth: We have received a large number of cyclo-styled letters from supporters of Naturewatch. A petition was also handed in at Downing Street by representatives of this organisation. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State has written to Naturewatch and will meet the organisation's Director shortly.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a Royal Commission on the use of animals for experimental purposes. [38631]

Mr. George Howarth: We have not yet decided whether a Royal Commission is necessary.

The Animal Procedures Committee is carrying out a review of all aspects of the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. We will be in a better position to decide on the need for and the remit of any Royal Commission once this review has been completed.

A Royal Commission would be extremely expensive, both in terms of money and human resources, and we estimate could take over two years to complete. We would rather use the resources that are currently available to make immediate improvements to the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986—for example by implementing the 13 recommendations made in the Animal Procedures Committee's interim report on the review of the Act and the policies I announced on 6 November.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current licensing arrangements to protect animals used in scientific experiments; [38632]

(2) if he will review the present provisions governing authorisation of experiments on animals for scientific research; and if he will make a statement. [38633]

Mr. George Howarth: The Animal Procedures Committee is reviewing the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. One of the specific areas it is looking at is the arrangements for personal and project licences and, in particular, the application of the cost/benefit assessment required by section 5(4) of the Act and the accessibility of information on alternatives to animal experiments.

The licensing arrangements under the 1986 Act are most rigorous in requiring certificates of designation, personal licences and project licences.

Certificates of designation ensure that establishments where animals are used in scientific procedures (or bred or supplied for such use) have high standards of care and accommodation and suitable veterinary and animal welfare personnel.

The project and personal licences ensure that those carrying out regulated procedures are qualified and suitable; that alternatives to animals are used wherever possible; and that any suffering or other harmful effects experienced by the animals have been weighed against the potential benefits (to humans or animals). Project licences

also contain detailed arrangements for the control and minimisation of any pain or suffering, and ensure that the number of animals used is minimised.

Prison Officers' Association

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to address the informal industrial action by the Prison Officers' Association. [38933]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* We have made clear on a number of occasions that there can be no place for disruptive industrial action in our prisons. In order to help create a positive industrial relations framework, my right hon. Friend and I have instructed the Prison Service to draw up plans for new pay determination and dispute resolution procedures.

In the handful of establishments where the local branch of the Prison Officers' Association has held an unofficial meeting during work time, pay has been stopped for the period of the meeting.

TREASURY

Italian Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the methodology of the calculation by the Italian Government of gross domestic product as published by the International Monetary Fund. [38215]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* All EU Member States make available gross domestic product figures compiled according to the System of National Accounts (1968 of the United Nations) and published by the IMF in "International Financial Statistics".

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much ABN Amro Rothschild was paid for handling the sale of the Government's stake in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. [38554]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* ABN AMRO Rothschild (AAR) acted as financial adviser and bookrunner to the Treasury for the sale in March 1998 of its remaining 12.4 million shares in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. The total fee due to AAR for these services is £175,734, representing 0.25 per cent. of the gross proceeds of £70,126,647.

Median Ages

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the median age of the population at five-yearly intervals from 1971 to 2031. [38722]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 21 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to answer your parliamentary question about the median age of the population at five-yearly intervals from 1971 to 2031. The data you requested are as follows:

Median age of the population of the United Kingdom 1971–2031

Year	*Median age*
1971	34.1
1976	33.8
1981	34.5
1986	35.4
1991	35.7
1996	36.4
2001	37.8
2006	39.3
2011	40.7
2016	41.7
2021	42.0
2026	42.5
2031	43.2

Source:
Population Estimates Unit, ONS Government Actuary's Department.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to ensure that the freedom of the Post Office to enter into domestic joint ventures does not give rise to unfair competition with other service providers. [38988]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The Post Office is subject to national and European competition rules. In addition, the guidelines for Post Office domestic joint ventures, set by the Government annexed to the response to the Trade and Industry Select Committee and published by the Committee as its fifth special report, are intended to safeguard against the possibility of unfair competition. The guidelines require, inter alia, that any proposed venture should satisfy normal commercial criteria, that its prices should at least fully meet long-term marginal costs (including a full contribution to overheads), that it should treat the element of the price which represents the charge for access to the monopoly infrastructure in a transparent way, and comply with state aids rules.

Fireworks

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will enter into discussions with the Home Office on the provision of a scheme for retailers to hand in fireworks which have become illegal to sell, to be operated by the fire brigades. [38721]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Although the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 prohibit the supply of certain fireworks to the general public, they may continue to be supplied to persons who are exempt from the prohibition. As far as we are aware, industry efforts to date have been to attempt

to find alternative legal markets for the prohibited fireworks. If there are signs that a significant number of retailers want to explore a system of simply disposing of the fireworks, we would be prepared to look at this possibility with the fire service authorities and anyone else who may be in a position to offer practical assistance.

Employment Rights Act

Mr. Wills: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Treasury ex-gratia payments in relation to claims under the provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996 have been made. [38927]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Since the Employment Rights Act became effective on 22 August 1996, eighteen ex gratia payments have been made.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list for each nuclear power station in the United Kingdom her estimate of *(a)* the current life expectancy and *(b)* the costs of decommissioning. [32063]

Mr. Battle: Decommissioning of a nuclear power station is a matter for the operator, taking into account the requirements of the regulatory authorities. This includes details of timing and finance.

Inward Investment

Mr. Love: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the total amount of inward investment by region in the United Kingdom for each of the past 10 years. [38380]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The available data are shown in the table. These are based on administrative information provided to the Department's Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) by companies. There is no requirement to notify the Department of investment decisions, therefore the data are probably underestimates of actual investment.

Although investment will usually be spread over a number of years, the total amount of the investment is recorded only in the year the announcement to invest was made.

The regions shown are Regional Development Organisations (RDOs).

Investment by region/country in £ millions (current prices), 1987/88–1996/97

	1987–88	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
English regions:										
North East	303	113	632	219	248	228	158	1,972	3,257	629
North West	258	448	1,045	429	488	198	257	364	151	348
Yorkshire and Humberside	44	61	136	497	181	135	944	137	35	658
East Midlands	22	50	737	166	30	3	910	1,928	752	120
West Midlands	322	288	493	584	275	250	459	951	850	2,655
South West	40	21	62	28	340	45	31	51	73	216
West of England	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	457
East	2	15	1	48	222	206	59	18	84	58
South East	369	281	23	1,212	112	105	255	731	480	101
London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]n/a	97	123
Countries:										
England	1,359	1,268	3,131	3,183	1,896	1,169	3,073	6,151	5,783	5,364
Wales	453	894	552	255	969	710	304	730	869	2,063
Scotland	318	490	1,603	266	336	413	625	1,111	1,059	3,028
Northern Ireland	72	240	135	173	41	229	346	352	374	476
Not attributable to any one region	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	50	—
UK Total (£ millions)	2,203	2,891	5,421	3,877	3,241	2,520	4,348	8,344	8,135	10,931

[1] Not applicable.

Notes:

1. Included in the South West before 1995–96.
2. Included in the South East before 1994–95.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Broadcasting

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Director General of the BBC concerning the Corporation's proposals to fund the converting of BBC Services into digital form by BSkyB. [39056]

Mr. Fisher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such discussions with the BBC. However, the Government support the BBC's stated aim of making its licence fee funded digital television services available on all digital delivery platforms, including digital satellite.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Director General of the BBC concerning the corporation's commercial relationships with private companies. [39057]

Mr. Fisher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's discussions with the Director General and others at the BBC frequently touch on the Corporation's commercial relationships. It is, however, primarily for the BBC Governors to ensure that such relationships are conducted on a basis which maximises the return to the licence fee payer while respecting fair trading and competition rules and promoting the overall interest of the BBC as a public service broadcaster.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what policies his Department has to stimulate the development of public service digital terrestrial broadcasting. [39011]

Mr. Fisher: The offers of guaranteed places on digital terrestrial television multiplexes, which have been accepted by all the existing terrestrial television broadcasters, will safeguard public service broadcasting and will enable those broadcasters to increase greatly the amount of programming they can deliver. The BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and S4C have all stated their intention to offer new services, some of which will be free to air.

Kick Boxing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support, indicating separately financial assistance for *(a)* travel, *(b)* equipment and *(c)* training, is given to individuals who represent England and Wales in kickboxing; what plans there are to increase such support, with particular reference to the National Lottery; and if he will make a statement. [38415]

Mr. Banks: The United Kingdom and Home Country Sports Councils, through whom Government support for sport is primarily channelled, do not provide financial support to kickboxing, and have no current plans to do so.

As independent bodies, established by Royal Charter, it is for the Sports Councils to decide which activities and organisations should be eligible for support, including funding from the National Lottery

Canal Restoration

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the National Heritage Lottery Fund on changes to the eligibility of canal restoration projects for funding; and if he will make a statement. [38591]

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such discussions. The criteria for Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awards are determined by the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the body responsible for the HLF, in accordance with their statutory powers and the policy directions issued by the Secretary of State. The HLF plans to issue revised guidance on canal projects later this year, which will take account of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council's review of Inland waterway restoration priorities.

Tourism

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps are taken by *(a)* the Millennium Commission and *(b)* the Heritage Lottery Fund to obtain the opinion of local people in areas where applications are made for grants to support major tourism projects. [38564]

Mr. Chris Smith: So far as the Millennium Commission is concerned, I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House. The Heritage Lottery Fund takes into account evidence of community support and involvement in a project, including details of public consultation, in considering applications for funding.

Millennium Declaration

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the outcome of discussions concerning the proposed international Millennium Greenwich Declaration. [38299]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department, the Millennium Commission and the New Millennium Experience Company have not received a formal proposal for an international Greenwich Millennium Declaration. However, were such a proposal to be forthcoming, it would be considered on its merits.

Women's Boxing

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received from women's boxing groups; and if he will make a statement. [37916]

Mr. Banks: Since May 1997, this Department has received one representation from the Women's Boxing Commission at the Amateur Boxing Association.

I appreciate the interest this issue creates, but I should explain that the Government do not control women's boxing—or indeed any other sport in this country. We are, of course, keen to see that the proper medical safeguards and regulations are in place for all sports, especially those which may carry a higher level of physical contact, and believe that the sport's governing bodies are well equipped to keep these in place.

IT Contracts

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list those companies awarded contracts by his Department for the supply of computer hardware and software in each year since 1992 indicating the value of each contract. [37976]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has outsourced the provision of IT support and services to Sema Group who are responsible for the bulk of computer hardware and software procurement. Through Sema, the Department spent £385,000 on software and £189,000 on hardware in 1997–1998, £223,000 on software and £540,000 on hardware in 1996–1997, and £213,000 on software and £145,000 on hardware in 1995–1996. Figures for previous years are not available.

The only contract for software and hardware let by the Department in this period was with CSL, the software cost was £88,000 and the hardware cost was £39,000.

Tourist Information Centres

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourist information centres are currently operating in the United Kingdom; how many operate *(a)* all year round and *(b)* seasonally; and what plans there are to open new tourist information centres. [37981]

Mr. Tom Clarke: There are 792 tourist information centres currently operating in the United Kingdom of which 564 open all year round and 228 are open seasonally. We are not aware of any plans at present to open new tourist information centres.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Service

31. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what efficiency savings he expects the Court Service to achieve in the years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [37645]

Mr. Hoon: The Court Service is planning initiatives to save £4.25 million in 1998–99; £9.95 million in 1999–2000; and £12.05 million in 2000–01. The savings will come from computerisation of administrative tasks in both the Crown and county courts, improved energy efficiency and the better use of resources.

Legal Expenses Insurance System

36. **Mr. Cranston:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of a legal expenses insurance system; and if he will make a statement. [37652]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are keen to encourage the widespread use by individuals of legal expenses insurance, which provides a means for people to pay for legal actions. In the recently published consultation paper Access to Justice with Conditional Fees we invited suggestions as to whether changes to the law, practice and procedure might be needed to encourage the expansion of legal expenses insurance.

Family Law

39. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received on proposals for the reform of family law. [37656]

Mr. Hoon: I have received a number of representations on a variety of issues concerning the reform of family law.

Security Services (Records)

40. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the availability of public records relating to the security services. [37657]

Mr. Hoon: In 1992, the then Lord Chancellor, following consultation with the Ministers concerned, renewed the approval to retain the records of the security and intelligence agencies and the retention of related departmental records until the end of 2011.

This approval to retain the records is not mandatory, it is permissive. All the agencies have programmes in place to review related records held by other government departments and these are released to the Public Record Office wherever possible. In addition, the Security Service and GCHQ are reviewing their own older records and releasing them to the PRO whenever such release is possible without compromising operational effectiveness. In the case of the Secret Intelligence Service, I refer the hon. Member to the answer he received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 12 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *324*.

Legal Aid

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions he has had with trades unions regarding legal aid. [37653]

Mr. Hoon: I met representatives of the trades unions and the TUC on 9 December last year, and 27 January and 24 February this year to discuss a number of matters including our proposals for legal aid reform. As I told my hon. Friend in an oral answer on 4 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1067, we discussed with the trades unions their excellent schemes, which provide legal advice and representation to trade union members. We also discussed the possibility of opening up these arrangements to a wider category of people.

Access to Justice

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to improve access to justice for those with learning difficulties. [37655]

Mr. Hoon: I am committed to improving access to justice for everyone. Those with learning difficulties will benefit from a number of existing initiatives. Magistrates' Courts Committees have recently been issued with a Good Practice Guide for Disabled Court Users, which sets specific performance standards for the courts. Each Crown and county court has appointed a Customer Service Officer whose role includes helping those with special needs. In the civil courts, there are provisions for the appointment of a next friend or guardian ad litem for those who are under a disability. Members of the judiciary, including the magistracy, are trained in equal opportunity matters, including those relating to disability. In addition, the report of the Interdepartmental Review of Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses has recently been completed and is being actively considered by Home Office Ministers.

Weymouth Land Registry

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are currently working in the Weymouth Land Registry; and if he will make a statement on trends in their work load. [37648]

Mr. Hoon: At 1 April 1998, there were 429 people working at the Weymouth District Land Registry. The volume of work at Weymouth is continuing to increase reflecting increased activity in the property market. The 1997–98 financial year showed an increase of 4½ per cent. over the previous year.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charter Mark

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what plans he has to extend the Charter Mark Awards Scheme to those organisations not currently eligible for consideration under the scheme; [38744]

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what criteria organisations have to meet to be considered for inclusion in the Charter Mark Awards Scheme. [38743]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The scheme is currently open to all public sector services that provide a service directly to members of the public. We have extended the scheme to cover other areas that receive a significant element of public funding, such as careers services, training and enterprise councils and registered housing associations.

Each year, we carry out a review of the current eligibility criteria for Charter Marks and I have recently considered whether eligibility should be extended to voluntary organisations and charities (and indeed private sector organisations). As a result, the 1998 scheme was extended to include independent schools, hospitals and hospices which are registered charities and receive at least 75 per cent. public funding. I have decided that, for the time being, our priority must be for the resources of the scheme to be focused on improving the quality of public sector organisations. However, I will continue to evaluate the comments of interested organisations as the scheme continues to develop and expand.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Vitamin B6

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his draft Statutory Instrument on the retail sale of vitamin B6 supplement has been passed for comment to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* other member states of the European Union. [38887]

Mr. Rooker: A copy of the draft regulations required to implement the proposed controls on dietary supplements containing vitamin B6 was sent to the European Commission on 3 April. It is the responsibility of the Commission to inform other member states of the European Union of the notification.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the United States Government concerning freedom of trade as regards his proposed restrictions on the retail sale of vitamin B6 supplements. [38883]

Mr. Rooker: Officials in the Department of Trade and Industry have received one letter from the Office of the United States Trade Representative which, among other things, notes that the Government's proposed controls on dietary supplements containing vitamin B6 would have implications for US trade in this product. The Government have also received a representation on this subject from two United States senators.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the American National Academy of Science and *(b)* representatives of the United States Government about the Academy's current investigation into the safety of vitamin B6. [38886]

Mr. Rooker: I am aware that the United States National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has been undertaking a review of dietary reference intakes for B vitamins, including vitamin B6, but I have not had any discussions on this matter with either the NAS or with representatives of the United States Government. However, officials in the Department of Trade and Industry have confirmed in correspondence with the Office of the United States Trade Representative in Washington that if further data on the safety of vitamin B6 were to become available during the current consultation exercise on the draft regulations required to implement the proposed controls on dietary supplements containing vitamin B6, it will be taken into account by the Government.

Badgers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current cost of *(a)* research into the cause of bovine TB related to badgers and *(b)* the experimental culling programme for badgers. [38882]

Mr. Rooker: The estimated cost of the MAFF TB research programme in the financial year 1997–98 was more than £1.7 million. Of this, about £1.2 million was concerned with understanding the relationship between TB in badgers and TB in cattle, and developing control methods to prevent transmission of TB to cattle. The research programme for 1998–99 is currently being finalised. I am not able to estimate the cost of the culling experiment until we have received the advice of the Expert Group looking at the design of the experiment, and decided how to proceed.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many responses he received to the consultation on the White Paper, "A Food Standards Agency: a Force for Change"; and of those how many were (i) broadly in favour of the proposals, (ii) broadly opposed to the proposals, (iii) in favour of including nutrition within the Agency's remit and (iv) in favour of the proposed funding arrangements. [39013]

Mr. Rooker: As of 17 April, 1,011 responses have been received. We are analysing these in detail and will make a statement in the near future.

All but a handful broadly welcomed our proposals, but crude analysis of numbers does not do justice to either the complexity of the issues or the subtlety of respondents' arguments.

Many major interest groups including consumer, public health, local authority, medical and other academic bodies favour including nutrition within the remit of the Agency, but others, including representatives of the food industry, remain opposed to the Agency having responsibility for nutrition.

A wide range of respondents, including production, manufacturing, retail and consumer groups, opposed funding the Agency through charges on industry, arguing that food safety and standards activity should be funded by the taxpayer. Many respondents raised points on the organisation and administration on the proposed licensing/registration scheme. The Government have undertaken to consult again on the options for the scheme before proposals are finalised.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to ensure that the composition of the Food Standards Agency reflects all sectors of the food industry. [39016]

Mr. Rooker: Our proposals on the composition of the Agency's Commission are set out in the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change" (Cm3830) which was published for consultation on 14 January.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that the remit of the Foods Standards Agency is limited to matters of food safety and does not include general public health issues. [39017]

Mr. Rooker: Our proposals on the remit of the Food Standards Agency were set out in the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change" (Cm3830) which was published for consultation on 14 January. The Bill establishing the Agency will specify the scope of its remit on food standards and safety.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements will be made within the Food Standards Agency to ensure the protection of commercially confidential material. [39015]

Mr. Rooker: Within the parameters which will be set out in the Bill to establish the Agency, and subject to the requirements of the forthcoming freedom of information legislation, the Agency will be expected to establish and make public its own procedures for protecting legitimate commercial confidentiality. However, as our White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change" (Cm3830) explains, it will publish information where there is a clear need for this to be in the public domain.

Home Grown Cereals Authority

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of the Home Grown Cereals Authority to be completed. [38803]

Mr. Rooker: Ministers expect to receive the recommendations of this review shortly.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme to be completed. [38799]

Mr. Rooker: The review of the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme is being taken forward as part of this Department's Comprehensive Spending Review.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the extent by which the Central Science Laboratory failed in 1996–97 to achieve its formal financial target of complying with PES budgetary controls and the supply estimates; and if he will set out the reasons for this failure. [37963]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 6 April 1998]:* The cash financial position for the Central Science Laboratory changed considerably during the year compared to the original plan. The extended and phased move to the York site, combined with the implications of the closure of the other sites, created a £467,000 shortfall compared to the PES target.

Scottish Fisheries

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on how the Working Time Directive will affect the Scottish fishing industry; and when industry representatives will receive full details on these matters; [39233]

(2) if he will make a statement on how the Working Time Directive will affect each category of shore fishermen. [39234]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

The sea fishing industry is currently excluded from the provisions of the Working Time Directive. The Commission has recently published its second consultation document on the excluded sectors. We shall be examining the Commission's proposals on their merits and in the light of the current arrangements and specific needs of each sector.

WALES

Education Units (Hospitals)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many education units for children have been established in Welsh hospitals. [38449]

Mr. Hain: There are no hospital schools in Wales. Local education authorities have a responsibility under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide suitable education for children of compulsory school age who are not in school. Where a hospital school is not involved, the arrangements which they make for children in hospital are a matter for them and for the health authority concerned. Information on this provision is not available centrally.

Young Athletes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to ensure the provision of facilities for young athletes in the north of Wales. [38437]

Mr. Hain: Through SPORTLOT—the Lottery Sports Fund for Wales—we are seeing a substantial growth in facilities to serve the local, regional and national needs of sport. Since it began operating in 1995, SPORTLOT has made 76 awards totalling £11.7 million towards the provision of new or improved sports facilities throughout

North Wales. This includes an award of over £0.5 million to help with the construction of an all-weather athletics track and stadium at Deeside College.

Island Green Redevelopment

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money from grants for which he is responsible has been paid to date to developers working on the Island Green and Wrexham Central Station site. [38534]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh Development Agency (WDA), acting as the Secretary of State's agent, is now responsible for the Urban Investment Grant (UIG) scheme. The Island Green redevelopment, of which the Wrexham Central Railway Station area is part, is the subject of a legal agreement for the provision of an UIG of £3.5 million. Payment of UIG is in arrears of expenditure on site and is proportionate to progress of the works. Whilst details of the payments made to developers are commercially confidential, the WDA has confirmed that, in this case, the first claim for payment of UIG has not yet been received.

Birth Control

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost to the NHS of *(a)* providing the contraceptive pill free, *(b)* providing abortions and *(c)* births in the last year for which figures are available. [37835]

Mr. Win Griffiths: *(a)* The total estimated cost of free contraceptive pills in 1997 to the NHS in Wales was £2.55 million.

(b) In 1996, there were 6,178 abortions to women in Wales paid for by the NHS.

(c) There were 35,066 births to Welsh residents in 1996.

Information on the costs of abortions *(b)* and *(c)* is not collected centrally. However, information is collected by medical and surgical specialty and the total expenditure by NHS Trusts on paediatrics, gynaecology, obstetrics, maternity general practice, community maternity services and community health education programmes in 1996–97 was £139.07 million.

Blood Donation Service

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of shortages of blood in the blood donation service in Wales on hospital waiting lists for operations in the last 12 months. [37672]

Mr. Win Griffiths: There has been only one occasion in the last 12 months, for a period of 48 hours, when a shortage of blood led to NHS Trusts in the Welsh Blood Service's area being advised to postpone elective surgery. It is difficult to assess accurately the impact on hospital waiting lists but it is likely to represent less than 1 per cent. of the NHS Wales activity and I expect NHS Trusts to rectify this as soon as possible. There have been no similar occurrences in North Wales.

National School Standards Task Force

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the National School Standards Task Force to report. [38800]

Mr. Hain: The Standards Task Force was established by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to advise him on education matters in England. Its terms of reference do not require it to report. In Wales, the Secretary of State consults widely on all measures proposed under his BEST programme to raise education standards.

New Deal

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the differences in priorities in respect of the implementation of the New Deal in Wales relative to other parts of the United Kingdom. [38732]

Mr. Hain: In Wales, we have our own New Deal Advisory Task Force, comprising representatives of private and public sector employers, the voluntary and environmental sectors and training and education providers. Since its establishment last summer, the Wales Task Force has actively pursued its remit of ensuring that the New Deal is tailored to meet the needs of Wales.

The Employment Service Strategic Plan for Wales highlights a range of issues that need to be considered in the delivery of the New Deal in Wales. Copies of this document have been placed in the Library of the House.

Postmarks

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the importance to local communities of a bilingual postmark. [37881]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

Decisions relating to postmarks are the operational responsibility of Post Office management. I understand from Royal Mail that it is their policy to use bilingual postmarks for mail originating in Wales wherever possible. I also understand that mail from North Wales to be processed at the planned new mail centre in Chester will have a bilingual postmark.

HEALTH

3M Capital Hip System

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those hospitals which used the 3M Capital Hip system. [31979]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the co-operation he has received from the suppliers of the 3M Capital Hip system. [31981]

Mr. Boateng: We welcome the clear statement that 3M Health Care has made about their responsibilities and particularly their commitment to provide funding for the assessment, treatment and long term follow-up of patients

who were given the capital hip implant. The company is cooperating closely with the Department and the Medical Devices Agency to establish the reasons for the early failure of this implant to see whether there are wider lessons to be learned.

Lead Paint

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by his Department to alert *(a)* GPs and *(b)* other health professionals to symptoms of lead poisoning and the risks associated with contact with lead in older paintwork in houses for (i) children and (ii) adults engaged in DIY. [39309]

Mr. Milburn: An item on lead poisoning from paint and other sources will be included in the issue of "CMO's Update" to be published on 5 May. "CMO's Update" is a communication from the Chief Medical Officer to all doctors in England. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Cleft Lips and Palates

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to improve the coordination of surgeons, speech therapists and psychologists in the delivery of cleft lip and palate services; [31984]

(2) what plans he has to extend local access to cleft lip and palate services; [31985]

(3) what plans he has to improve the delivery of cleft lip and palate services in the United Kingdom. [31983]

Mr. Boateng: The Clinical Services Advisory Committee's report on cleft lip and/or palate, and the Government's response, were published on 23 February. Copies are available in the Library. We are committed to implementing the Committee's recommendations relating to raising quality standards and improving clinical outcomes by concentrating cleft lip and palate services in a fewer number of centres in the United Kingdom. We will establish an implementation group to progress this work, taking account of access, delivery and the coordination of services.

Heart Attacks

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list figures for the survival rates of *(a)* men and *(b)* women after their first heart attack. [37869]

Mr. Milburn: Figures in the form requested are not available centrally. Figures held by the Office for National Statistics show that in 1996, 37,717 men and 30,639 women in England and Wales died from heart attacks, making a total of 68,356.

Butane Gas Misuse

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have occurred by age and region in each of the last 10 years due to the volatile substance misuse of butane gas products. [38146]

Mr. Milburn: The available figures are set out in the table. Tables for deaths cannot be broken down on a more detailed basis without rendering individual cases identifiable.

Deaths associated with the abuse of butane gas products UK: 1986 to 1995 [1]

	Ages					
	10–14[1]	*15–19*	*20–24*	*25–29*	*30 and over*	*Total*
North	3	22	1	1	1	28
North West	6	33	13	3	1	56
Yorkshire/Humberside	7	30	8	3	3	51
East Midlands	4	22	3	4	0	33
West Midlands	4	35	8	2	1	50
East Anglia	0	10	1	0	2	13
South East	18	61	23	12	7	121
South West	1	19	7	1	2	30
England total	43	232	64	26	17	382
Wales	0	8	4	0	2	14
Scotland	5	39	10	3	4	61
Northern Ireland	0	7	1	0	0	8
United Kingdom total	48	286	79	29	23	465

[1] Includes one aged nine.

Tamoxifen

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the indicators so far from the tests of the Tamoxifen drug in Britain. [38945]

Mr. Boateng: The International Breast Cancer Intervention Study is co-ordinated by the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research (UKCCCR) with Dr. Trevor Powles as the principal investigator in the UK. The study is investigating the use of Tamoxifen for the prevention of breast cancer in otherwise healthy women who are at increased risk of breast cancer because of a family history. The UKCCCR established a data and safety monitoring committee for the study which has met at six-monthly intervals in the light of recently announced findings from a similar study in the United States of America and Canada. It will shortly be issuing a report.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS element of health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product for the years 1968–69 to 1998–99. [38723]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is set out in the table.

United Kingdom National Health Service expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product

Year	UK NHS gross expenditure as a percentage of GDP[1]
1968	3.9
1969	3.8
1970	3.9
1971	3.9
1972	4.0
1973	4.1
1974–75	4.8
1975–76	5.1
1976–77	5.0
1977–78	4.8
1978–79	4.7
1979–80	4.7
1980–81	5.3
1981–82	5.5
1982–83	5.5
1983–84	5.3
1984–85	5.4
1985–86	5.2
1986–87	5.1
1987–88	5.1
1988–89	5.1
1989–90	5.1
1990–91	5.2
1991–92	5.7
1992–93	6.0
1993–94	5.9
1994–95	5.8
1995–96	5.8
1996–97	5.7
1997–98[2]	5.6
1998–99[3]	5.6

[1] Using GDP deflator of 17 March 1998.
[2] Estimated outturn position.
[3] Planned expenditure on the NHS.

Health Care Priorities

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the setting up of a national council on health care priorities; and if he will make a statement. [38716]

Mr. Milburn: A range of suggestions to improve priority setting in the National Health Service has been made, including setting up a national council on health care priorities. We have set out our plans for the NHS in *The New NHS* White Paper. It sets out measures to improve national consistency while allowing local flexibility to ensure services are responsive to local needs and wishes. We do not see a place for a national council within these arrangements.

Hospital Consultants

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the merit award system for hospital consultants. [38754]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *197*.

Specialties

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* ECG technicians, *(b)* orthotists, *(c)* prosthetists, *(d)* neuro-physiologists, *(e)* audiologists, *(f)* clinical biochemists, *(g)* clinical psychologists, *(h)* pharmacists and *(i)* physiotherapists are employed by the NHS in each grade; and for each grade how many of these are women. [39029]

Mr. Milburn: The information is not available in precisely the format requested, as the Department's non-medical workforce census no longer collects information about grade, and does not separately identify all of the staff groups requested. The table gives the information that is available.

National Health Service hospital and community health services scientific, therapeutic and technical staff by sex working in specific areas of work in England as at 30 September 1996.

	Whole-time equivalents		
	Male	Female	Total
All scientific, therapeutic and technical staff	25,480	73,550	99,030
All physiotherapy staff	1,340	12,520	13,860
Manager	20	140	160
Therapist	1,070	9,780	10,860
Tutor	[1]—	30	30
Student/trainee	50	270	330
Helper/assistant	190	2,300	2,490
All clinical psychology staff	1,000	2,340	3,340
Manager	50	30	80
Scientist	810	1,720	2,530
Scientific officer	90	380	470
Technician	10	20	30
Student/trainee	50	180	230
All pharmacy staff	1,900	6,620	8,530
Manager	90	70	160
Scientist	970	2,260	3,230
Scientific officer	130	260	390
Technician	470	3,240	3,710
Student/trainee	20	1,401	70
Helper/assistant	220	660	880

[1] five or less
Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
Source:
Department of Health 1996 non-medical workforce census

Medicines Review

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work and proposed reporting arrangements of the review of prescribing, supply and administration of medicines. [39227]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* We plan to publish shortly the review team's first report on the supply and administration of medicines under group protocols. The second and final report of the review will be published after the review has been completed, which is expected to be during the summer.

Discharge Plans

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to require hospital trusts to involve carers and patients in the production and signing-off of discharge plans; [39054]

(2) if he will make it his policy to require hospital trusts to provide patients and their carers with a copy of their discharge plan. [39051]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* General good practice guidance on hospital discharge procedures—"Hospital Discharge Workbook—a manual on hospital discharge procedures"—makes it clear that the patient, their family and carer, should be consulted and informed at all stages of their discharge, they should have their own copy of an agreed discharge plan, the discharge plan should contain no big surprises, and the discharge should happen according to the plan.

Health Service Guidance (95)8, "NHS Responsibilities for Meeting Continuing Health Care Needs" included, in its discharge section, a reminder about the workbook. The HSG added that patients and their families and carers should be kept fully informed about how procedures for hospital discharge and the multi-disciplinary assessment of patients continuing health care needs will work, and should receive relevant information (in writing and in other formats appropriate to their needs) they require to make decisions about continuing care.

Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the representations made by the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority in their report, "The River Runs Dry", concerning the impact of the current capitation formula on the allocation for 1998–99. [39049]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* We have noted the comments about the national weighted capitation formula in the consultation document "The River Runs Dry".

The weighted capitation formula has been updated since the document was published. For 1998/99 allocations, services for people with learning difficulties were weighted for additional need.

As part of their work programme, the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation will consider the possible extra unavoidable costs associated with providing services for ethnic populations and the health needs of mentally disordered offenders.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the final full year figures for *(a)* Merton and Sutton and *(b)* Wandsworth district health authorities for (i) the amount by which they were above or below target, (ii) the level of recurring overspend against allocation and (iii) the comparable figures for the new Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority. [39053]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* Merton and Sutton District Health Authority and Wandsworth District Health Authority were merged on 1 April 1994. The final year that they existed as two separate authorities was therefore 1993/94. However the allocation for 1994/95 was calculated on the old basis and information on the allocation for both years is given in the tables.

1993/94	*Allocation (£000)*	*Weighted capitation target (£000)*	*Distance from target (£000)*	*Distance from target (per cent.)*
Merton and Sutton	122,724	119,610	3,114	2.6
Wandsworth	87,243	72,023	15,220	21.1
Total	209,967	191,633	18,334	9.6

1994/95	*Allocation (£000)*	*Weighted Capitation Target (£000)*	*Distance from Target (£000)*	*Distance from Target (per cent.)*
Merton and Sutton	122,065	120,060	2,005	1.7
Wandsworth	85,574	72,545	13,029	18.0
Total	207,638	192,604	15,034	7.8

Currently, the allocation and weighted capitation position for Merton Sutton & Wandsworth Health Authority is:

1998/99	*Baseline Allocation (£000)*	*Weighted capitation target (£000)*	*Distance from target (£000)*	*Distance from target (per cent.)*
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth	309,537	293,327	16,210	5.5

Information on recurrent expenditure was not recorded before 1997/98 so information on recurrent overspending of the two district health authorities at the time of the merger is not available.

The reported surplus/(deficit) in the accounts of the two authorities for 1993/94 (before adjusting for directly managed units and common services) were:

	£000
Merton and Sutton	(£51)
Wandsworth	£1,003

Watford and Mount Vernon NHS Trust

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the extra money promised for the NHS in the Budget will be given to the Watford and Mount Vernon NHS Trust to reduce waiting lists. [38864]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 21 April 1998]:* Of the extra £417 million made available in the Budget to the National Health Service in England for 1998–99, £320 million will be targeted directly on cutting waiting lists. Ninety per cent. of this will be allocated to health authorities in line with their initial general allocations for this financial year against targets for reduced waiting lists by the end of March 1999. These targets will in turn be built into service agreements with NHS Trusts. The other

ten per cent. will be used to reward good performance and to tackle poor performance. Further announcements on the remaining £97 million will be made in due course.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Parliament

10. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on progress on the design for the Scottish Parliament. [37623]

Mr. McLeish: The design team selection process is proceeding to schedule. From some 70 firms submitting bids, 12 have been chosen to take part in competitive interviews in May and, thereafter, 3 or 4 firms will be asked to prepare indicative design proposals for the Holyrood site which will go on public display. The design team will be appointed in July.

Education Expenditure

12. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate what expenditure on education in Scotland in 1998–99 will be as a proportion of Scottish gross domestic product. [37626]

Mr. Wilson: It is estimated that expenditure on education in Scotland this year will be approximately 6½ per cent. of Scottish gross domestic product.

Inward Investment

13. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to secure inward investment for rural areas. [37627]

Mr. Wilson: Locate in Scotland promotes the whole of Scotland as a location for inward investment.

Its approach is, first, to interest potential investors in Scotland and then to identify those locations which best meet their requirements. Where appropriate, Locate in Scotland ensures that potential investors are fully aware of rural locations which may be suited to their requirements.

16. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the level of inward investment in Scotland in 1997. [37630]

Mr. Wilson: Inward investment in Scotland has been running at record levels for the past few years and that success is continuing. Only last Friday, I was delighted to be able to announce another 800 new jobs at a call centre in Dundee. The detailed inward investment figures for 1997–98 will be published in the Locate in Scotland Annual Review in June.

"Working Together for a Healthier Scotland"

14. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in response to his consultation document, "Working Together for a Healthier Scotland". [37628]

Mr. Galbraith: Since the publication on 5 February 1998 of the Green Paper, "Working Together for a Healthier Scotland", 214 responses have been received to date.

Abortion

15. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his answer of 17 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *579*, on abortion law, what response he has made to the six letters. [37629]

Mr. Galbraith: The six letters sought changes in the current abortion law. They received responses explaining that this Government, like their predecessors, do not adopt a collective position on the ethical issues of abortion and that proposals for changes in the abortion law have always been decided in Parliament on the basis of free votes.

Petrol and Diesel Prices

17. **Mrs. Laing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the price of petrol and diesel in rural Scotland. [37631]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations regarding petrol and diesel prices in rural Scotland from companies, community and interest groups, and from members of the public.

Passenger Registration Directive

19. **Mr. Alasdair Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the EU Passenger Registration directive. [37633]

Mr. McLeish: My right hon. Friend has received no representations concerning the EU Passenger Registration Directive.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has consulted widely with industry about the proposed Directive. It has set up a working group of shipping representatives which includes the Chamber of Shipping and the British Ports Association, to consider how the Directive should be implemented. Full consultation with affected parties will take place once the Directive has been adopted.

Ferry Services

20. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contingency plans his Department has made against a major ferry breakdown in the Caledonian MacBrayne fleet. [37634]

Mr. McLeish: Decisions on the deployment of vessels in the event of a major vessel breakdown within the Caledonian MacBrayne network are operational matters for the company. I am well aware that the recent breakdown of the "Isle of Lewis" has made it necessary to redeploy vessels throughout the CalMac network and temporarily to suspend and re-schedule some services. I do regret the inconvenience which may be caused to the company's customers and I understand that Caledonian MacBrayne is doing all it can to minimise disruption of services. I hope that normal scheduled services can be resumed as soon as possible.

Decentralisation

21. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to decentralise Government departments and agencies throughout Scotland. [37635]

Mr. McLeish: Staff of The Scottish Office and its related Agencies already work from a number of locations around Scotland. Staffing dispositions are kept under review to ensure continued efficiency and value for money. There are no present plans to make significant changes to existing staff dispositions. Future arrangements would be a matter for the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament.

Scottish Economy

22. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to discuss trends in the Scottish economy. [37636]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend last met the Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise on 9 January 1998 when he accompanied the Chairman to discuss Scottish Enterprise's strategy for economic development and related issues.

Trunk Roads Review

24. **Mr. Swinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to conclude the strategic review of the trunk road network; and if he will make a statement. [37638]

Mr. McLeish: We intend to issue a consultation document on a revised appraisal framework for assessing future expenditure on the trunk road network shortly after the publication of the Scottish Integrated Transport White Paper. Investment decisions will be based on the criteria of integration, accessibility, economy, safety and environmental impact. The Review will be completed once responses to the consultation document have been considered in the autumn.

Council Housing

25. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with Scottish local authorities on the future provision of council housing in Scotland. [37639]

Mr. Macdonald: I frequently meet Scottish local authorities to discuss matters related to council housing stock, and other housing issues.

Rural School Closures

26. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of rural school closures. [37640]

Mr. Wilson: I have invited authorities to apply a test of proportional advantage to any proposed closure of a rural school, demonstrating whether the educational and financial gains outweigh any negative effects on the community.

Employment

27. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish TUC to discuss the employment situation in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37641]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend has had frequent meetings with the Scottish TUC during which a great number of issues of importance to the Scottish economy have been discussed. He took the opportunity yesterday when he addressed the Annual Congress of the STUC to emphasise the importance of modernisation and partnership to help the Scottish economy become more internationally competitive.

Millennium Compliance

28. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the millennium compliance of his Department's information technology systems. [37642]

Mr. Dewar: I have received no representations on the millennium compliance of my Department's computer systems. My Department is taking appropriate steps to ensure that its information technology systems are thoroughly checked for millennium compliance, and that any necessary remedial action is completed in line with the timetable set out in the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 3 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 622. My Department contributes quarterly progress reports on millennium compliance; these are published on the Internet.

Child Care

23. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to assist lone parents seeking jobs or training to obtain child care. [37637]

Mr. Wilson: We are taking action in a number of important ways. Under the New Deal for Lone Parents, the Employment Service offers advice and assistance on childcare to lone parents seeking employment. Assistance with childcare is available on all four options under the New Deal for young people. We are committed to developing a national childcare strategy for Scotland which will increase the range of childcare options available to parents, including lone parents. Almost £30 million extra in public funding and from lottery funds will be available for childcare in Scotland over the next five years. The new childcare tax credit in the Working Families Tax Credit will be a big improvement in childcare help.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he intends to take to reduce carbon emissions from *(a)* power generation and *(b)* road traffic in order to meet the targets agreed by the Government at Kyoto. [38562]

Mr. Macdonald: The UK share of the European Union's target of 8 per cent. arising from Kyoto will be agreed in discussion with Member States. This will place an obligation on the UK as a whole to cut a basket of 6 greenhouse gas emissions. The UK provisional target, reached in March 1997 and based on a 3-gas basket, stands at 10 per cent. We indicated before Kyoto that we were prepared to consider doing more than this but we would not do so simply to enable others to do less. We have a separate domestic aim of a 20 per cent. cut in CO_2 emissions.

The Government plan to issue a consultation paper in the summer. This will discuss policy options for meeting the UK's legally binding target. It will also discuss measures which would move beyond that towards our 20 per cent. CO_2 aim.

The contribution that might be made by the power generation and road transport sectors is being considered as part of the various wider reviews in these areas. I would not want to pre-judge the outcome of these reviews.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that local education authorities undertake partnerships in respect of the provision of pre-school education in 1999 with providers in the private and voluntary sector. [38628]

Mr. Wilson: I announced on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *383* the detailed arrangements for funding pre-school education in the 1998–99 school session. I again confirmed that local authorities carry the lead responsibility for planning, co-ordinating and delivering pre-school services in their area. I expect them to collaborate with providers in the voluntary and private sectors wherever this would best serve the needs of children and their parents and fulfil the principles of 'best value'. Whilst decisions on partnerships will rest with local authorities, I have again drawn their attention to the Government's wider policy goals in welfare reform and the development of a national childcare strategy. It would be counter-productive if expansion of pre-school education services at authorities' own hand inhibited the ability of other sectors to contribute to the Government's overall objectives.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria he will use when reviewing progress made by local authorities in establishing partnerships with the private sector to provide pre-school education in 1999. [38629]

Mr. Wilson: The autumn review of partnership will look at the full range of possible partnership relations, as set out in last autumn's consultative paper "Education in Early Childhood: The Pre-School Years". It will include an assessment of the volume, type and location of pre-school education places which authorities have decided to commission from the private and voluntary sectors; and it will look at quality assurance initiatives in support of those places. I shall not be seeking to reach judgments about optimal levels of partnership activity, either locally or nationally, although I shall of course consider very seriously any evidence that cost-effective opportunities for partnership are being neglected.

Council Tax

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each local authority area in Scotland the estimated additional council tax revenue which could be collected if the appropriate percentage referred to in section 79(3) of the Local government Finance Act 1992 was *(a)* 30 per cent., *(b)* 40 per cent. and *(c)* 50 per cent. [38670]

Mr. Macdonald: The "appropriate percentage", currently 25 per cent., is a discount from council tax bills where there is one person resident in a dwelling. Increasing that percentage would therefore, other things being equal, reduce rather than increase council tax revenue. The table estimates the additional revenue which would be forgone by each council in Scotland for each of the suggested "appropriate percentages", assuming no change to the council tax set by each council.

Estimate of revenue forgone—£ million

	'appropriate percentage' of:		
Council	*30%*	*40%*	*50%*
Aberdeen City	1.4	4.1	6.8
Aberdeenshire	0.9	2.8	4.6
Angus	0.5	1.5	2.5
Argyll & Bute	0.8	2.4	4.0
Clackmannanshire	0.2	0.7	1.2
Dumfries & Galloway	0.7	2.1	3.5
Dundee City	1.2	3.7	6.2
East Ayrshire	0.5	1.4	2.4
East Dunbartonshire	0.5	1.4	2.4
East Lothian	0.5	1.4	2.3
East Renfrewshire	0.4	1.1	1.9
Edinburgh City	3.4	10.3	17.2
Eilean Siar	0.2	0.5	0.8
Falkirk	0.7	2.0	3.3
Fife	1.8	5.3	8.9
Glasgow City	4.5	13.5	22.5
Highland	1.4	4.2	7.1
Inverclyde	0.5	1.4	2.3
Midlothian	0.4	1.1	1.9
Moray	0.4	1.2	2.0
North Ayrshire	0.7	2.1	3.4
North Lanarkshire	1.3	3.8	6.4
Orkney	0.1	0.3	0.4
Perth & Kinross	0.8	2.3	3.8
Renfrewshire	0.9	2.7	4.5
Scottish Borders	0.5	1.5	2.5
Shetland	0.1	0.2	0.4
South Ayrshire	0.6	1.8	3.0
South Lanarkshire	1.4	4.2	7.0
Stirling	0.5	1.4	2.3
West Dunbartonshire	0.6	1.9	3.1
West Lothian	0.7	2.0	3.3
Scotland	28.6	85.7	142.8

Note:
Calculation based on council tax levels set by councils in 1998–99, and allows for the effect of the 'appropriate percentage' on those receiving one discount and two discounts.
Sources:
Council Tax Base Return 1997 (CtaxBase97), completed by all councils;
Council Tax Assumptions Return 1998 (CTAS98), completed by all councils.

Tourist Boards

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in respect of each area tourist board in Scotland, the amount of funding (i) received from each local authority in the area in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 and (ii) to be received from each local authority in the area in 1998–99. [38666]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

£

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Aberdeen and Grampian			
Aberdeen City	300,000	300,000	150,000
Aberdeenshire	400,000	300,000	300,000
Moray	120,000	100,000	150,000
Total	820,000	700,000	600,000

£

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Angus & City of Dundee			
Angus	158,000	158,000	158,000
Dundee	246,000	246,000	246,000
Total	404,000	404,000	404,000
Argyll, the Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling and Trossachs			
Argyll and Bute	210,000	189,000	190,000
Clackmannanshire	33,890	28,807	28,807
Falkirk	67,640	62,417	55,420
Stirling	174,950	157,455	158,100
West Dunbartonshire	67,325	56,325	59,260
Total	553,805	494,004	491,587
Ayrshire and Arran			
East Ayrshire	97,000	82,450	79,200
North Ayrshire	200,000	170,000	163,200
South Ayrshire	180,000	153,000	146,900
Total	477,000	405,450	389,300
Dumfries and Galloway	400,000	360,000	345,000
Edinburgh & Lothians			
Edinburgh	1,047,616	989,616	989,616
East Lothian	185,000	185,000	185,000
West Lothian	51,500	46,500	46,500
Midlothian	35,000	35,000	35,000
Total	1,319,116	1,256,116	1,256,116
Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley			
Glasgow	1,475,000	1,425,000	1,425,000
East Dunbartonshire	0	0	40,000
East Renfrewshire	0	0	0
Inverclyde	100,000	100,000	100,000
North Lanarkshire	5,000	0	60,000
Renfrewshire	56,000	68,000	56,000
South Lanarkshire	102,000	102,000	102,000
Total	1,738,000	1,695,000	1,783,000
Highlands of Scotland	542,805	550,000	495,000
Kingdom of Fife	500,000	490,000	450,000
Orkney	185,500	185,500	190,140
Perthshire	638,674	530,000	483,000
Scottish Borders	295,000	275,750	266,985
Shetland	92,545	137,180	137,180
Western Isles	64,223	70,000	82,000
Total	8,030,668	7,553,000	7,373,308

Bus Services

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the additional number of bus services which will be established as a result of the rural transport funding package announced by his Department in March; and if he will make a statement. [38667]

Mr. McLeish: I am confident that the £4.5 million package, the major part of which I am earmarking for aiding rural bus services, will significantly improve public transport links in rural areas. However, as we are currently consulting about the distribution of that proportion of the funding which will be made to local authorities, we have not yet made any predictions about the number of additional bus services which will be provided.

Student Loans

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to *(a)* give part-time students access to loans on the same basis as full-time students and *(b)* change the accounting rules so that student loans are counted as investment; what discussions he has held on this subject; with which bodies; and if he will make a statement. [38821]

Mr. Wilson: We have, at present, no plans to extend loans to part-time students. However, the provisions of the Teaching and Higher Education Bill would allow loans to be extended to part-timers in the future. We have already taken steps to assist part-time students who experience financial hardship by extending the availability of the Access Funds. We are also considering what other measures might be appropriate to their particular circumstances.

The Government's proposal to move to a system of full resource accounting and budgeting in 2001–02 will result in student loans being treated as a balance sheet asset in the Department's accounts. The precise treatment of student loans in the public accounts is ultimately a matter for the Treasury, but the Education Departments are exploring the question.

Licensed Premises

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has made to proposals by Glasgow Council for amendment of the laws and regulations covering licensed premises. [37619]

Mr. McLeish: Glasgow City Council has not submitted any recent proposals on laws and regulations covering licensed premises. Any such proposals would, of course, be given careful consideration.

Secondary Schools (Glasgow)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the educational performance of Glasgow's secondary schools. [37625]

Mr. Wilson: The Government and Glasgow City Council share the common objective of raising standards in all secondary schools and are pursuing a range of policies at national and local level to realise that objective.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people entered Gateway services to date in each of the Pathfinder areas; what was the average duration of the Gateway period; and how many have been referred or placed on the *(a)* employment, *(b)* education and training, *(c)* voluntary sector and *(d)* environmental task force options. [36346]

Mr. Andrew Smith: At week ending 3 April, 16,840 young people had entered the Gateway nationally. There have been 4,838 referrals (with, in some cases, more than one relating to any particular individual) to the Employment Option, 1,311 to the Full-time Education and Training Option, 353 to the Voluntary Option and 211 to the Environment Task Force Option. A table showing the breakdown of Pathfinder areas follows. It is too early to give the average duration of the Gateway period as the pathfinders only started on 5 January and there are insufficient numbers completing the Gateway to give a valid sample.

Vacancies

	Number invited to initial Gateway interview	*Number of unsubsidised job submissions during Gateway*	*Number of submissions to Employer Option*	*Number of referrals to FTE/Training Option*	*Number of referrals to VS Option*	*Number of referrals to ETF Option*
Sheffield	2,768	1,094	1,194	284	30	22
Tayside	1,075	454	348	49	26	9
Swansea	1,854	2,389	623	193	45	41
Cornwall	1,689	935	937	168	130	57
Newcastle	2,276	906	573	335	83	12
Eastbourne	440	320	54	60	8	0
Lambeth	1,218	471	154	49	19	11
S'Derby	1,185	750	69	8	0	0
B'Country	2,559	2,623	318	79	1	4
Harlow	493	289	29	37	3	21
Cumbria	995	760	636	113	54	38
Wirral	1,112	395	368	81	20	43
Totals	17,664	11,405	5,305	1,456	419	239

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to monitor the success of the New Deal in increasing employment rates for those young people with a history of delinquency. [38390]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The term "delinquency" is very broad and could legitimately be defined as including a range of anti-social behaviour, some of which could not be identified formally, for example, through a criminal record. As a key part of the evaluation of the New Deal, we will seek to relate the employment outcomes of individual New Deal participants to the characteristics, circumstances and labour market history of the individual, and to assess the extent to which these outcomes might have occurred in the absence of New Deal. As part of this work, we shall be addressing the significance of a criminal record in employment and the success of the New Deal in overcoming barriers it may create.

Skill Shortages (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from *(a)* industrialists and *(b)* other employers in the Seaham and Peterlee areas concerning skill shortages of the unemployed. [37859]

Dr. Howells: The Department received no representations from industrialists, and other employers in the Seaham and Peterlee areas concerning skill shortages of the unemployed.

Jobcentres

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is his estimate of the cost of refurbishing and repainting Employment Service offices in connection with the introduction of the New Deal; [38317]

(2) how much orange paint has been used in the redecoration of Employment Service offices in connection with the New Deal; and at what cost. [38318]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:* Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. David Willetts, dated 21 April 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the estimated cost of refurbishing and repainting Jobcentres in connection with the introduction of the New Deal, and how much orange paint has been used, and its cost. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

As part of the overall programme of preparation for the introduction of New Deal, Ministers have authorised improvements to the environment of our Jobcentres including the provision of New Deal furniture and fittings.

You will see from the following table that overall capital expenditure in Jobcentres, including the improvements for New Deal, will be less in 1998–1999 than in previous years.

£ million

Year	*Total*
1993–94	57
1994–95	45
1995–96	38
1996–97	60
1997–98 (estimated)	40
1998–99 (estimated)	32

Much of this expenditure will substitute and accelerate other work which was already in planned expenditure. The expenditure, which is being monitored closely, has been authorised under strict guidelines that match the work to be done with the existing condition

of the Jobcentre, its size, and the level of New Deal business expected. In connection with the introduction of New Deal, some £6.8M has so far been committed to this work.

It is not possible to identify precisely the cost of the orange paint used as part of the redecoration. However, in a typical Jobcentre the cost is likely to be around £20.

I hope this is helpful.

Mobile Children

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local education authorities who have applied for support of mobile children under section 488 of the Education Act 1996 indicating the amount granted for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [38058]

Mr. Byers: The total number of Local Education Authorities in England applying for support under Section 488 of the Education Act 1996 was 96 in 1996–97, 108 in 1997–98 and 125 in 1998–99. Total grant allocated for the financial years in question was £6,838,000 in 1996–97; £7,055,000 in 1997–98 and £7,275,000 in 1998–99.

Detailed information relating to England is shown in the following table.

Local education authorities in receipt of grant under section 488 of the Education Act 1996

Local Education Authorities		*1996–97 Allocation*	*1996–97 Grant*	*1997–98 Allocation*	*1997–98 Grant*	*1998–99 Allocation*	*1998–99 Grant*
Barnsley	T	32,836	21,343	38,680	25,142	39,763	25,846
Bedfordshire	T	240,535	156,348	245,346	159,475	252,216	163,940
Bolton	T	52,622	34,204	57,093	37,110	58,692	38,150
Bradford	T	174,364	113,337	177,851	115,603	182,831	118,840
Brent	T	76,517	49,736	97,195	63,177	98,380	63,947
Bromley	T	55,980	36,387	60,025	39,016	61,706	40,109
Buckinghamshire	T	196,000	127,400	199,920	129,948	205,518	133,587
Bury	T	13,377	8,695	14,613	9,498	15,022	9,764
Cambridgeshire	T	344,912	224,193	351,810	228,677	361,661	235,080
Camden	T	75,680	49,192	88,183	57,319	90,652	58,924
	R	27,221	17,694	29,102	18,916	29,917	19,446
Cheshire	T	148,292	96,390	151,258	98,318	188,500	122,525
Cornwall	T	57,530	37,395	58,681	38,143	60,324	39,211
Cumbria	T	47,880	31,122	48,255	31,366	49,606	32,244
Derby	T	149,581	97,228	152,573	99,172	173,945	113,064
	R	50,669	32,935	0	0	0	0
Devon	T	219,817	142,881	224,213	145,738	230,491	149,819
Doncaster	T	111,643	72,568	113,876	74,019	117,065	76,092
Durham	T	160,207	104,135	163,411	106,217	167,987	109,192
Ealing	T	90,629	58,909	92,442	60,087	95,030	61,770
East Riding	T	248,950	161,818	263,929	171,554	271,319	176,357
East Sussex	T	80,777	52,505	82,393	53,555	119,172	77,462
Enfield	T	37,588	24,432	52,956	34,421	54,439	35,385
Essex	T	385,181	250,368	392,885	255,375	360,266	234,173
Gateshead	T	32,243	20,958	32,888	21,377	33,809	21,976
Gloucestershire	T	139,432	90,631	142,221	92,444	146,203	95,032
Greenwich	T	62,584	40,680	63,836	41,493	65,623	42,655
Hackney	T	80,480	52,312	82,090	53,359	84,389	54,853
Hammersmith	T	40,864	26,562	56,253	36,564	57,828	37,588
Hampshire	T	175,071	113,796	146,424	95,176	150,524	97,841
Haringey	T	118,310	76,902	120,676	78,439	124,055	80,636
Harrow	T	71,353	46,379	72,780	47,307	74,818	48,632
Hertfordshire	T	441,846	287,200	450,683	292,944	463,302	301,146
Hillingdon	T	70,969	46,130	72,388	47,052	100,199	65,129
	R	24,294	15,791	29,851	19,403	30,686	19,946
Hounslow	T	102,525	66,641	104,576	67,974	107,504	69,878
Kensington	T	33,150	21,548	33,813	21,978	34,760	22,594
Kent	T	401,136	260,738	423,159	275,053	476,615	309,800
Kirklees	R	25,954	16,870	0	0	0	0
Lambeth	T	28,000	18,200	35,504	23,078	36,498	23,724
Youth Project	R	82,208	53,435	87,562	56,915	90,014	58,509
Adult Project	R	37,784	24,560	38,920	25,298	40,098	26,064
Lancashire	T	266,477	173,210	271,807	176,675	297,418	193,322
Leeds	T	227,465	147,852	232,014	150,809	238,510	155,032
Leicestershire	T	250,874	163,068	256,841	166,947	264,033	171,621
Lewisham	T	18,558	12,063	18,929	12,304	19,459	12,648
Lincolnshire	T	184,485	119,915	188,175	122,314	193,444	125,739
Manchester	T	214,499	139,424	218,789	142,213	224,915	146,195
Middlesbrough	T	107,414	69,819	109,562	71,215	112,630	73,210
Newcastle	T	25,276	16,429	26,026	16,917	26,755	17,391

Local education authorities in receipt of grant under section 488 of the Education Act 1996

Local Education Authorities		*1996–97 Allocation*	*1996–97 Grant*	*1997–98 Allocation*	*1997–98 Grant*	*1998–99 Allocation*	*1998–99 Grant*
Newham	T	64,657	42,027	65,950	42,868	67,797	44,068
Norfolk	T	252,555	164,161	257,606	167,444	264,819	172,132
Northamptonshire	T	223,088	145,007	249,800	162,370	256,794	166,916
Northumberland	T	44,104	28,668	44,986	29,241	46,246	30,060
North Yorkshire	T	134,472	87,407	176,368	114,639	181,306	117,849
Nottinghamshire	T	125,807	81,775	117,467	76,354	120,756	78,491
Oldham	T	30,246	19,660	32,544	21,154	16,755	10,891
Oxfordshire	T	323,233	210,101	329,698	214,304	338,930	220,305
Poole	T	72,946	47,415	74,405	48,363	76,488	49,717
Richmond	T	20,690	13,449	21,104	13,718	21,695	14,102
Rochdale	T	83,646	54,370	90,680	58,942	93,219	60,592
Rotherham	T	33,032	21,471	33,693	21,900	32,945	21,414
Salford	T	38,386	24,951	54,154	35,200	55,670	36,186
Sheffield	T	118,473	77,007	120,842	78,547	124,226	80,747
Solihull	T	39,005	25,353	41,340	26,871	42,498	27,624
Somerset	T	107,099	69,614	109,241	71,007	112,300	72,995
S. Glouc.	T	268,586	174,581	273,958	178,073	281,629	183,059
Southwark	T	49,900	32,435	50,898	33,084	52,323	34,010
St. Helens	T	0	0	30,000	19,500	30,840	20,046
Suffolk	T	148,371	96,441	151,338	98,370	155,575	101,124
Sunderland	T	25,333	16,466	30,329	19,714	314,178	20,266
Surrey	T	242,192	157,425	247,036	160,573	253,953	165,069
	R	21,053	13,684	0	0	0	0
Sutton	T	0	0	0	0	57,580	37,427
Tameside	T	99,602	64,741	94,800	61,620	97,454	63,345
Thurrock	T	0	0	0	0	60,050	39,033
Tower Hamlets	T	32,550	21,158	33,201	21,581	34,131	22,185
Trafford	T	28,920	18,798	29,498	19,174	30,324	19,711
Wakefield	T	57,209	37,186	57,354	37,280	58,960	38,324
Warwickshire	R	28,000	18,200	0	0	0	0
West Sussex	T	141,350	91,878	144,177	93,715	148,214	96,339
Wigan	T	72,524	47,141	73,974	48,083	76,045	49,429
Wiltshire	T	162,418	105,572	165,666	107,683	170,305	110,698
Wokingham	T	196,491	127,719	200,421	130,274	206,033	133,921
Wolverhampton	T	787,906	512,139	803,664	522,382	826,167	537,009

Notes:

1. LEAs involved in consortia. Listed is the lead authority receiving grant, with the partner authorities listed in brackets
   - Bedfordshire: (Luton)
   - Buckinghamshire: (Milton Keynes)
   - Cambridgeshire: (Peterborough)
   - Cheshire: (Halton, Warrington)
   - Derby City: (Derbyshire)
   - Devon: (Plymouth, Torbay)
   - Durham: (Darlington)
   - East Riding of Yorkshire: (Hull, NE Lincolnshire, N Lincolnshire)
   - East Sussex: (Brighton & Hove)
   - Essex: (Southend)
   - Hampshire: (Portsmouth, Southampton)
   - Kent: (The Medway Towns)
   - Lancashire: (Blackburn, Blackpool)
   - Leicestershire: (Leicester, Rutland)
   - Middlesbrough: (Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees)
   - North Yorkshire: (York)
   - Nottinghamshire: (Nottingham)
   - Poole: (Bournemouth, Dorset)
   - South Gloucestershire: (Bath, N E Somerset, City of Bristol, N Somerset)
   - Wiltshire: (Swindon)
   - Wokingham: (Bracknell Forest, Newbury, Reading, Slough, Windsor, & Maidenhead)
   - Wolverhampton: (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Herefordshire, Sandwell, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, The Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Worcestershire)
2. T = Traveller project. R = Refugee (displaced persons) project
3. Grant is paid at a rate of 65% on approved expenditure.

Workplace Nurseries

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals the Government have to encourage the provision of more workplace nurseries at affordable cost to parents. [38417]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We are keen to persuade employers of the benefits of helping employees with their childcare needs. Workplace nurseries are one way of doing this, but other ways may be more appropriate for, in particular, smaller companies.

Employers can claim their day-to-day expenditure on childcare provision or subsidies for their employees as an allowable expense when calculating their business profits for tax purposes. And the childcare tax credit announced in the Budget will make childcare more affordable for working parents.

Our national childcare strategy Green Paper, which we will be publishing in the next few weeks, will be considering how companies can be encouraged to adopt more "family-friendly" policies.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the decision of the TTA to re-direct in-service funding in the South West; and if he will publish the reasons underlying the re-direction. [39022]

Ms Estelle Morris: I understand that the Teacher Training Agency reached its decisions on the allocation of the relevant funding on the basis of competitive bids from providers to deliver in-service training for teachers judged according to their quality in meeting identified national priorities. The Agency has issued contracts for the academic year 1998–99. Final allocations for later years will be determined by the Agency in due course, taking account of the representations which have been received.

Disability Rights Task Force

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the members of the Disability Rights Task Force and the criteria governing their appointment. [38870]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The members of the Disability Rights Task Force are:

Name	
Stephen Alambritis	Head of Press and Parliamentary Affairs, Federation of Small Businesses
Bob Benson	Director of Disability Scotland
Jane Campbell	Member of the National Centre for Independent Living and British Council of Organisations of Disabled People
Caroline Gooding	Member of Trades Union Disability Alliance
David Grayson	Chair of the National Disability Council, Business Links National Advisory Panel, a director of Business in the Community
Rachel Hurst	Chair of Rights Now
David Jenkins	General Secretary of Welsh TUC
Su Jenkins	Legal Adviser, J. Sainsbury PLC
Brian Lamb	Assistant Director and Head of Public Affairs, SCOPE
Colin Low	Vice Chair, Royal National Institute for the Blind
Tracey-Jane Malthouse	Employment Research Executive, Institute of Directors
Joe Mann	General Secretary, National League of the Blind and Disabled
Bert Massie	Director of Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Denise Platt	Head of Social Services, Local Government Association
Brian Pomeroy	Senior Partner, Deloitte & Touche Consulting Group
Philippa Russell	Director of the Council for Disabled Children
Liz Sayce	Policy Director, Mind (National Association for Mental Health)
Susan Scott-Parker	Chief Executive, Employers' Forum on Disability
Ranjit Sondhi	Former Deputy Chairman of Commission for Racial Equality
James Strachan	Chief Executive, Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Richard Taylor	Chief Executive, Lifespan NHS Trust
Keith Welton	Group Chief Executive, Mid Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited
Monica Wilson	Chief Executive of Disability Action
Richard Wood	Chief Executive, British Council of Organisations of Disabled People

EU Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the EU Labour and Social Affairs Council of Ministers meeting on 7 April. [37182]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The Secretary of State for Education and Employment chaired the meeting of the Social Affairs Council on 7 April. The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and I also attended.

There was discussion on National Employment Action Plans, the production of which was agreed at last November's "Jobs Summit" in Luxembourg, and on the Social Affairs Council's role in assessing them in advance of the Cardiff European Council in June 1998.

The Council adopted Conclusions on worker protection from asbestos, calling on the Commission to bring forward proposals. A Directive on the protection of workers from chemical agents was adopted.

The Council adopted a Directive extending to the United Kingdom the Part-time Work Directive, which had been adopted by the other 14 Member States last December under the Agreement on Social Policy. The Council had further discussion on the follow-up to the Davignon report on worker participation under the proposed European Company Statute.

The UK Presidency reported on the informal meeting of Education and Social Affairs Ministers held in London in March.

The Council noted Presidency Conclusions about the Commission's fundamental review of co-ordination of social security for migrant workers.

The Commission made presentations on reform of the Structural Funds; on its Action Plan on Racism and Xenophobia; on sectors excluded from the Working Time Directive; on a draft report from the High Level Group on Industrial Change; on draft amendments to the Carcinogens Directive; and on the PHARE Programme.

Student Loans

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to *(a)* give part-time students access to loans on the same basis as full-time students and *(b)* change the accounting rules so that student loans are counted as investment; what discussions he has held on this subject; with which bodies; and if he will make a statement. [38820]

Dr. Howells: We agree with the Dearing Committee's recommendation that extending loans to part-time students in higher education should not be a priority. While we have taken alternative steps to protect part-time students who experience financial hardship, we have no plans to extend loans to them at this stage. The provisions of the Teaching and Higher Education Bill would, however, allow loans to be extended to part-timers at some time in the future and we will keep the position under review.

The Government's proposal to move to a system of full Resource Accounting and Budgeting in 2001–02 will result in student loans being treated as a balance sheet asset in the Department's accounts. Discussions on this issue are taking place as part of wider preparations for the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting across government, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to make available details of the training programme to equip the Millennium Taskforce with the skills necessary to deal with the millennium bug; how this programme will be advertised through jobcentres; and if he will make a statement. [39055]

Dr. Howells: A national leaflet has been produced for employers and individuals describing the help that is available. Officials are discussing with the Employment Service how the leaflet can be best used in Jobcentres.

The members of the Task Force were drawn from organisations of and for disabled people, business (including small business), local government and trade unions with the intention of forming a group with the necessary breadth of knowledge, skills and experience of disability to report to Government on how best to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people, taking account of the interests of all interested parties.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Computer Systems

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list each major new computer system that *(a)* her Department, *(b)* non-departmental bodies and *(c)* agencies under her responsibility have purchased in the last five years; what was the initial purchase cost and what was the final cost; what was each system's (i) planned and (ii) actual date of commissioning; what major computer systems will be purchased by bodies in categories (a), (b) and (c) in the next financial year; and what is their estimated cost. [27848]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is listed in the table.

	Cost (£000s)		*Commission date*	
	Estimated	*Actual*	*Planned*	*Actual*
(a) Departmental Systems				
1993–94				
Nil				
1994–95				
Upgrade of Department of Education VAX system	128	129	March 1994	June 1994
Department of the Environment Office Automation	3,460	—	March 1995	Ongoing
Department of Finance and Personnel Network and System Management	120	120	May 1994	May 1994
1995–96				
Department of Education Inspectorate	142	220	September 1995	September 1996
Department of Education Presentation Unit	105	108	February 1996	April 1996
Department of Agriculture VAX system	203	222	May 1995	August 1995
1996–97				
Nil				
1997–98				
Department of Education Resource Accounting	364	—	April 1997	Ongoing
Department of Finance and Personnel Resource Accounting	478	—	April 1997	Ongoing
Parliament Buildings Network	255	255	April 1997	June 1997
NIO Automation System	4,050	4,380	June 1997	November 1997

	Cost (£000s)		Commission date	
	Estimated	Actual	Planned	Actual
1998–99				
Office of the Director of Public Prosecution	750	—	—	—
Department of Education PC Roll Out	592	—	—	—
Department of Education Sun System Upgrade	247	—	—	—
Department of Agriculture Communications Strategy Implementation	220	—	—	—
Animal and Public Health System	2,400	—	—	—
(b) Non Departmental Public Bodies System				
1993–94				
RUC Criminal Intelligence System	118	125	January 1994	April 1994
Police Authority Fleet Management System	470	505	January 1994	January 1994
Prism Specialist RUC System	517	530	March 1994	June 1994
1994–95				
RUC Automated Fingerprint Recognition	900	900	April 1994	April 1994
Police Authority Financial Stores and Purchasing System	845	900	April 1994	April 1994
Fire Authority (NI) Business Systems	341	341	December 1994	December 1994
Fire Authority (NI) CAD and Scanning System	189	189	March 1995	June 1995
1995–96				
Nil				
1996–97				
RUC Message Handling System with Data Network	5,773	6,900	August 1996	November 1996
Computerised Information for the Management of Further Education in NI	1,194	1,257	June 1997	August 1997
Fire Authority (NI) Geographical Information System	164	164	September 1996	Ongoing
Fire Authority (NI) Business Support Contract	420	—	March 1997	Ongoing
1997–98				
Police Authority Office Automation System	160	160	January 1998	February 1998
1998–99				
RUC Integrated Criminal Information System	1,000	—	—	—
Policy Authority Payroll Computer System	250	—	—	—
RUC Manpower Administration and Registry System	3,146	—	—	—
Education and Library Boards Accruals Accounting System	1,500	—	—	—
Belfast Link Laboratories Laboratory Management System	1,170	—	—	—
South and East Belfast Trust Community Information System	458	—	—	—
Fire Authority (NI) Command and Control Communication System	2,800	—	—	—
Fire Authority (NI) Business Support Systems	2,100	—	—	—
Fire Authority (NI) Payroll System	155	—	—	—
Housing Executive Financial Systems	476	—	—	—
(c) Agencies Systems				
1993–94				
Construction Service CAD Expansion	208	208	February 1994	February 1994
Roads Service Fleet Management	180	191	October 1993	March 1995
Roads Service Data Communications	750	819	February 1994	February 1994
1994–95				
Rate Collection Agency Billing System	1,200	1,200	November 1994	February 1995
Roads Service Traffic Accident Analysis	186	222	December 1994	October 1995
Water Service Laboratory Information Management	364	407	March 1995	March 1996
1995–96				
Construction Service CAD Expansion	125	125	January 1996	March 1996
Construction Service MACAWS	171	182	April 1995	Ongoing
Road Service Maintenance (Client) System	1,395	1,490	July 1995	November 1997
Water Service Oracle Financials	1,089	1,733	April 1995	April 1995
T&EA Training Information Management System	160	160	April 1995	April 1995
1996–97				
Construction Service Maintenance Management	207	228	December 1996	July 1997
Water Service Stores and Purchasing	375	223	March 1997	June 1997

	Cost (£000s)		Commission date	
	Estimated	Actual	Planned	Actual
1997–98				
Construction Service CAD Upgrade	290	—	March 1998	Ongoing
Public Records Office (NI) Management System	200	200	December 1997	February 1998
Water Service Metered Billing	446	489	April 1997	April 1998
Industrial Research and Technology Unit Laboratory Information Management System	310	310	May 1997	March 1998
1998–99				
Construction Service Work Order Processing	120	—	—	—
Construction Service Costing, Charging and Project Control	122	—	—	—
Training and Employment Agency Information Systems	750	—	—	—
Forensic Science Agency DIP	200	—	—	—
Prisons Office Automation	247	—	—	—

Marches and Parades

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been charged with offences relating to obstructing *(a)* the republican Rosslea Martyrs procession on 12 October 1997 and *(b)* traditional Orange Order and Black Institution church parades during 1997 in Newtownbutler. [37383]

Mr. Ingram: Of the thirty-nine people interviewed and charged in relation to the Rosslea Martyrs Parade, thirty-eight have been charged with 'obstructing a lawful activity in a public place'. Other offences charged include 'possession of an offensive weapon', 'disorderly behaviour', 'obstructing police' and 'dangerous driving'.

In relation to the Royal Black Preceptory parade in Newtownbutler, thirteen persons have been charged with the principal offence of 'obstructing a lawful activity in a public place' and a variety of ancillary offences including 'disorderly behaviour', 'riotous behaviour', 'possession of an offensive weapon', 'provocative conduct', 'criminal damage' and 'playing a recording of sounds which are threatening, abusive, or insulting'.

Stevens Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish the terms of reference given to Mr. John Stevens prior to and during his inquiries. [37738]

Mr. Ingram: The terms of reference given to Mr. John Stevens were those stated in the summary of the Report published in 1990. They were recorded in the published summary of his report:

"investigating: the Dunmurra Police Station incident; the alleged disappearance of photo montages from Ballykinler Army Camp; the alleged leak of information associated with the murder of Mr. John Anthony Loughlin Maginn; and following consultation with the Chief Constable, any associated matters which came to light during the course of the Enquiry."

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish the full findings of the second Stevens Inquiry. [37734]

Mr. Ingram: A summary was published. The full report remains confidential to the Chief Constable. It was not published because to do so would endanger the confidential nature of operational procedures.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will commission independent research to assess the numbers of individuals who have become vulnerable following the loss, theft or misuse of information, personal files or documents originating from the security services. [37735]

Mr. Ingram: An inquiry into this was conducted by Mr. John Stevens. Any individuals who became vulnerable were informed at the time.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will ask the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland to re-examine evidence presented by Mr. John Stevens in his January 1995 report. [37737]

Mr. Ingram: No. No useful purpose would be served by asking the DPP for Northern Ireland to re-examine information unless new evidence was produced that had a material bearing on the conclusions of the report.

Public Interest Immunity

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will take steps to ensure that public interest immunity is not used to prevent evidence of collusion being introduced in proceedings taking place in *(a)* criminal courts, *(b)* coroners' courts and *(c)* public or judicial inquiries. [37811]

Mr. Ingram: As was indicated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General on 11 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *616–17*, Ministers of the present Government assent to public interest immunity only where the relevant Minister believes that disclosure of a document or piece of information will cause real damage to the public interest. The Secretary of State applies this test vigorously.

Where public interest immunity applies, the Secretary of State's policy is to make voluntary disclosure if she considers that the interest of justice outweighs the public interest in withholding the document or information in question. In all cases, a claim for public interest immunity is subject to the power of the court or other tribunal to order disclosure.

RUC Investigations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RUC investigations have been conducted into the loss or theft of documents and

security files since 1982; how many officers and soldiers were charged with (i) disciplinary offences and (ii) criminal offences arising from such investigations; and how many were subsequently disciplined or punished. [37810]

Mr. Ingram: The required information is not readily available and would incur disproportionate cost to provide.

Planning, Newtownards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the extent of the developments at the Ballyreagh, Bowtown and Movilla Road districts in Newtownards *(a)* which have received planning permission and *(b)* for which planning applications are presently under consideration; and what proposals there are to improve the existing road infrastructure in this part of Newtownards. [37557]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for these matters have been delegated to the Planning Service and the Roads Service under Mr. T. W. Stewart and Mr. W. McCoubrey respectively. I have asked them to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 8 April 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Question about housing developments in Newtownards.

The extent of the housing development in Ballyreagh, Bowtown and Movilla areas of Newtownards is most appropriately considered within the context of the North Down and Ards Area Plan. Since the commencement of the Plan in 1984, approximately 1650 houses have been built on land zones for development in the east of the town, and it is estimated that there is potential for a further 700 new houses. Planning permission has been granted for a substantial proportion of these dwellings.

There are two current planning applications proposing housing development on land not zoned for development in the Plan. These are:

(i) a site of 4.6 hectares at the Movilla Road end of Ballyreagh Road; and

(ii) a site of 20 acres at Bowtown Road end of Ballyreagh Road.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 6 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to respond to the roads element of your recently tabled PQ about the extent of developments and proposals to improve the existing roads infrastructure in the Ballyreagh, Bowtown and Movilla Road districts in Newtownards. In his absence, I am replying.

Roads Service has 2 proposals for the area in question. A scheme to provide a link between Bowtown Road and Portaferry Road, at an estimated cost of £1M, is currently included in the 6–15 year major road works programme and a scheme to realign a section of road adjacent to 116 Movilla Road, at an estimated cost of £50K, is included in a list of possible schemes for inclusion in the minor works programme for the Ards Borough Council area.

I hope you find this information helpful.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners (Canada)

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Canadian Government concerning the situation of British expatriate state pensioners living in Canada who do not receive any uprating of their pensions. [38727]

Mr. Denham: The Canadian Minister of Human Resources Development wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last September about this issue. Canadian Ministers have raised the matter from time to time in meetings with their UK counterparts. The last such occasion was in October 1997 when my Noble Friend, the Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, met the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa.

There are competing demands and constraints on Social Security spending. In these circumstances, the Government believe that it would be wrong to raise expectations that uprating UK pensions paid abroad would be likely to attract priority.

National Insurance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the cost to public funds of the increase in national insurance rebates on appropriate personal pensions to compensate for the impact of lost investment income as a result of the removal of ACT credits on dividends on UK equities. [38792]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *355–56*.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages of (i) taxing and (ii) means-testing disability living allowance. [38994]

Mr. Denham: We have concluded and made clear in the Green Paper, "New ambitions for our country: A new contract for welfare", that Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) will remain universal, national benefits and as such they will not be subject to a means test. Taxation matters are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Green Paper does not include any proposals to tax DLA or AA.

Lone Parents

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 19 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *738–39*, how many lone parents who gained employment between: *(a)* 1 July and 22 October 1997, *(b)* 23 October and 30 November 1997, *(c)* 1 December and 31 December 1997, *(d)* 1 January and 31 January 1998 and *(e)* 1 February and 28 February 1998, are now in receipt of income support and have no earnings. [37592]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 7 April 1998]:*

The number of lone parents who obtained employment and who are now in receipt of income support and have no earnings

Period	*Number of lone parents who obtained employment/increased hours*	*Number of lone parents who obtained employment/increased hours, but who are now in receipt of Income Support and have no earnings*
21 July-22 October 1997	518	87
23 October—30 November 1997	391	69
1 December—31 December 1997	141	20
1 January—31 January 1998	228	23
1 February—28 February 1998	240	28

The Government are conducting a full independent evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents which will report in Autumn 1999. This will assess the programme's overall effectiveness, and will measure the percentage of lone parents moving into work as a result of the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Notes

1. Figures are given from the 21 July rather than 1 July as this was when the first prototype of the New Deal for Lone Parents started.
2. The figures given for the number of lone parents who have found employment include those lone parents who have increased their hours whilst participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents.
3. The figures in the third column differ slightly from those in my Written Answer 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *738–739*, which sought similar information for the periods of 23 October-30 November 1997, 1–31 December 1997, and 1–31 January 1998. This is because the figures given in this reply represents information as of 17 April 1998 and not as of 18 March 1998.

Welfare Reform Review

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will place in the Library a list of consultees for the Welfare Reform Review. [38389]

Mr. Field: We are encouraging the widest possible debate on how best to rebuild the welfare system so it is fit for the 21st century. The Green Paper, "New Ambitions for our Country: a new contract for welfare", which we published on 26 March, is the next stage on the road to reform and we are seeking views on its proposals from all sections of the community by 31 July 1998.

There is no narrow list of consultees, all views are welcome and to maximise this debate we have published a free summary version and made this and the full document accessible via the Internet (www.dss.gov.uk). Copies of both documents are also available on request in braille, audiocassette, Welsh and large print.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the average length of time taken to hear appeals from people whose incapacity benefit has been withdrawn under the all-work-test in the Seaham and Peterlee areas; and how many appeals remain outstanding. [37865]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The operation of the appeals system is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) who report that the statistics it maintains do not differentiate between those appeals which concern the All Work Test and those which concern other aspects of entitlement to Incapacity Benefit.

Incapacity Benefit appeals for people living in the Seaham area are heard at ITS's Sunderland tribunal venue, whilst those for people living in the Peterlee area are heard at Durham. The latest available figures show that the average length of time between lodgement and hearing of an Incapacity Benefit appeal in Sunderland is 20 weeks and in Durham is 23 weeks. For the North East Region of ITS as a whole, the average time is 20 weeks. Figures for the number of Incapacity Benefit appeals awaiting determination are not available for the individual tribunal venues, but for the North East Region as a whole the current total is 4,306.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what initiatives her Department is undertaking to involve the private sector in Benefits Agency business; which companies are involved; which areas of Benefits Agency core business are affected; when the results are expected; and if she will make a statement. [38990]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* There are currently two initiatives under way within the Benefits Agency involving the private sector. Neither has yet reached a contract stage. The Accommodation and Office Service (AOS) Project is exploring whether further private sector involvement could improve the delivery of office related services. The Area Directorates and Partnering Team (ADAPT 98) Project involves three private sector consortia working in partnerships with three BA Area Directorates in order to gain a full understanding of BA operations and to formulate proposals for improvements in service delivery.

The administration of these initiatives is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Brian M. Donohoe dated 21 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what initiatives her Department is undertaking to involve the private sector in Benefits Agency (BA) business; which companies are involved; which areas of BA core business are affected and when the results are expected.

There are currently two initiatives under way within the BA involving the private sector. Neither has yet reached a contract stage.

Accommodation and Office Services (AOS) Project

The AOS Project is exploring whether further private sector involvement could improve the delivery of office related services, mainly within the BA. The services involved are typing and word

processing, messengerial, fleet management, shuttle buses, secretarial, reprographics, some archival storage, post opening and despatch, stationery and telephony.

The companies invited to tender to provide the services are: Rentokil Initial Management Services, Haden Building Management Limited, SERCO Government Services Limited, AMEC Facilities Limited and Partnership Property Management Limited. On current timetable, a decision is expected in the summer.

Area Directorates and Partnering Team Project (ADAPT 98)

The ADAPT 98 Project involves three private sector consortia working in partnerships with three of the BA's Area Directorates (ADs). The private sector partners are:

Eisis, a consortium comprising EDS as the prime contractor with AT Kearney, Price Waterhouse Management Consulting Ltd and Manpower Plc as subcontractors. Eisis are partnering AD1 East London and Anglia;

Equip, an alliance between Capita and AT&T with Aon Risk Services, Bull Information Systems and Group 4. Equip are partnering AD10 Yorkshire; and

SeAD, a consortium led by Sema Group and made up of Sema Group, WS Atkins and Deloitte and Touche with Hays plc and Nat West Bank Group as sub-contractors. SeAD are partnering AD4 West Country.

The partnerships between the private sector and the ADs began on 13 August 1997 and will last for up to 12 months. During this Partnership Period, the private sector partners' primary activity is to gain a full understanding of BA operations and to formulate proposals for improvements in service delivery.

We expect to receive proposals from all the private sector partners by the end of the Partnership Period. There are no predetermined outcomes to the Project and no commitments have been given about the nature and timing of any contracts which may be let following the Partnership Period.

Proposals will be evaluated against Ministers' criteria for use of the private sector as well as value for money considerations.

I hope that this is helpful.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the companies she has commissioned to undertake focus group research indicating the individual projects they are undertaking and the companies that tendered for each contract. [38218]

Mr. Field *[pursuant to his reply, 7 April 1998, c. 223–24]:* The Department publishes a Research Yearbook which contains details of contracts awarded in the relevant financial year.

Organisations commissioned to undertake focus group research for the Department and the title of each contract are as follows:

Newchurch and Company—Child Support Agency customer and compliance research.

Market Opinion Research International—Attitudes towards welfare reform.

Market Opinion Research International—Attitudes to disability benefits.

British Market Research Bureau International—Attitudes towards housing benefits.

Institute for Employment Studies—People management in DSS Headquarters.

Social and Community Planning Research—On-going contract for qualitative research on welfare reform issues.

Social and Community Planning Research—Survey of women; developmental work.

Social and Community Planning Research—Preparation for Women's Juries.

Social and Community Planning Research—Work Incentives and Intermediaries.

Social and Community Planning Research—Take up of Income Support amongst Older Citizens.

Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University—Earnings Top Up Staff Panel.

Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University—Invalidity Benefit and the Contributory principle.

Alan Hedges—Pensions and Retirement Planning.

Alan Hedges—Behavioural Response to the evidence requirements.

Andrew Irving Associates—Counter fraud publicity.

One World—New Deal for Lone Parents: development of publicity work.

Navigator—Fraud: attitudes to national benefit fraud hotline publicity.

Reflexions—Fraud: reporting changes in circumstances.

Michael Herbert—Pensions: approaches to information material.

Cragg Ross Dawson—Creative Development Research for a New Deal for Lone Parents Newsletter.

Market Opinion Research International—Development for New Deal for Lone Parents' Messages.

Research contracts are normally let by competitive tender, although the Department also makes use of the Central Office of Information's framework agreement with approved suppliers. Single tender may be used, for example where a supplier has special expertise or experience, is the sole supplier or has sole access to records or data, or in cases of extreme urgency. Details of organisations who have tendered unsuccessfully for contracts is commercial in confidence.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 April 1998

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Human Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to introduce training programmes for the judiciary on international human rights standards and on the jurisprudence of international human rights bodies. [38915]

Mr. Hoon: This question was originally tabled for answer by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but has been transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department which has responsibility for judicial training in Northern Ireland.

Arrangements for judicial training are undertaken by the Judicial Studies Board for Northern Ireland, which is serviced and funded by the Northern Ireland Court Service. On 20 February the Lord Chancellor delivered the Board's Annual Address on "The Incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights". The Board's current programme includes a series of training events on the Convention and future events are planned.

Welsh Language (Family Courts)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has recently received on the question of the payment of translators to and from the Welsh language in family courts; and if he will make a statement. [38018]

Mr. Hoon: I have not recently received any representations about the payment of Welsh language translators, but I am aware that court staff occasionally receive representations about this. The Court Service will arrange and pay for translators in all family proceedings where necessary in county courts and the High Court. Magistrates courts are considering whether to introduce this facility.

Surveys

Mr. Forth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *788–89*, concerning information, promotional marketing and opinion survey contracts, if he will provide a breakdown of the item 1999–2000, information meetings. [38447]

Mr. Hoon: When Part II of the Family Law Act 1996 is implemented, all married people wishing to divorce will be required to attend an information meeting. A series of pilots are being run in a number of areas throughout England and Wales aimed at finding the best system for delivering the information meeting.

All aspects of the pilot projects are being objectively tested through a major evaluation programme which is being conducted in five phases between March 1997 and May 1999. The views of the public who attend meetings, those involved in the organisation and delivery of the pilots and all relevant professionals and organisations within the pilot areas are being sought as part of the evaluation programme. The item referred to is the projected grant in aid expenditure for the evaluation programme and is broken down as follows:

1996–1997: £24,415

1997–1998: £546,892

1998–1999: £650,000

1999–2000: £150,000.

Lawyers (Contingency Fees)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many representations he has received on the subject of contingency fees payable to lawyers; and if he will make a statement. [38453]

Mr. Hoon: I do occasionally receive letters about contingency fees. However the Government propose to extend the types of proceedings for which conditional fee agreements are available. Those proposals were set out in the consultation paper Access to Justice with Conditional Fees which was published on 4 March. The consultation paper invited responses and thirty-five have been received to date.

Legal Aid (Personal Injury Claims)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he will take to ensure access to legal aid for children involved in personal injury claims. [38586]

Mr. Hoon: The Government's proposed reforms to legal aid and conditional fees will increase access to justice for everyone, young or old. We believe that it will be possible for people regardless of age or financial standing to find lawyers to take P.I. cases through conditional fee agreements. It is important that we re-focus the Legal Aid Fund towards the areas where it can bring greatest help and do most good, and in which there is no alternative to publicly funded help with legal fees.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Trunk Road Network

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of the United Kingdom primary trunk road network is currently maintained to the 45HB standard. [39040]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* For trunk roads in England, for which the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions has responsibility, our best estimate is that approximately 80% of the network is currently maintained to the 45HB standard.

Toxic Smoke

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to limit the generation of toxic smoke and fumes from building products. [39296]

Mr. Raynsford: The Building Regulations 1991 are intended to secure the health and safety of people in and around buildings, and paragraph B of Schedule 1 to the Regulations makes functional requirements to cover fire safety. Guidance on how these requirements may be met are given in Approved Document B, and, as far as materials used in construction are concerned, performance standards are set based on recognised test methods.

With regard to the generation of toxic smoke and fumes from building products, there is no recognised method of test as yet that provides a practicable performance standard that would be satisfactory for regulatory purposes. Although the Single Burning Item test being developed in support of the Construction Products Directive does address smoke production, it does not consider toxicity.

Child Restraints

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his assessment of the level of compliance with the legislation relating to safety restraints for children in the rear of motor vehicles; if he will take steps to monitor compliance with the legislation; if he will introduce legislation to make the fitting of child restraints in the rear seats of motor vehicles compulsory; and if he will make a statement. [38931]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Transport Research Laboratory survey seat belt wearing rates in motor vehicles twice yearly on behalf of the Department. The latest results—for October 1997—show that for children aged 0–4 years the wearing rate was 85% observed in all cars (ie including those not fitted with rear restraints), and that for children aged 5–13 years was 71%.

We have no plans at present to make the fitting of child restraints in the rear seats of motor vehicles compulsory as this would be harsh on parents who depend on others for lifts, or who have older cars without rear seat belts or anchorage points. But, serious injuries to children can be significantly reduced if they are in a suitable seat restraint and we strongly recommend they should always be used wherever fitted. We are also planning a publicity campaign later in the year to encourage seat belt wearing, particularly in the rear of motor cars.

London Underground

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on developments on London Underground since his statement on 20 March. [39422]

Mr. Prescott: I have decided to restructure the London Transport Board, bringing in a part-time non-executive Chairman. The present Chairman of London Transport (LT), Peter Ford, who is a full-time executive Chairman, has therefore been asked to vacate the chairman's job. Mr. Ford will therefore leave LT today.

I should like to pay tribute to the commitment Peter Ford has shown to London Transport over the past three and a half years. His period as Chairman has seen a marked increase in the number of passengers using the Underground and the London buses, reaching record levels. There has also been a major improvement in the financial performance of both businesses, and of LT as a whole, such that LT now makes a substantial contribution to its investment programme. Peter Ford has been an untiring advocate for London Transport, and his contribution to thinking and debate about the future has been significant. I am grateful to him, and wish him well for the future.

The changes I am making will cover the period during which we will be implementing the London Underground Public Private Partnership which I announced last month, and the run up to the creation of the Greater London Authority. I have concluded that the best arrangement will be to move to a new senior management structure. I shall be announcing new appointments to the LT Board in due course. Mr. Brian Appleton, currently non-executive Vice chairman of the LT board, has agreed to act as Chairman until a permanent appointment can be made.

Business Rates

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those authorities where the business rate base represents more than 60 per cent. of the combined total of their business and council tax bases. [38573]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is in the table.

Authorities where the business rate represents more than 60 per cent. of the combined total of their business and council tax bases in 1998–99.

Based on estimated yield from the uniform business rate and assumed income from the council tax for standard spending.

Authority	*Percentage*
City of London	99.4
Westminster	88.7
Hillingdon	76.2
Crawley	75.0
Camden	74.0
Tower Hamlets	72.4
Copeland	71.8
Corby	70.3
Slough	69.9
Watford	67.6
Norwich	66.4
Manchester	65.4
Islington	65.3
Reading	64.8
Cambridge	64.6
Thurrock	64.4
Swindon	63.5
North Lincolnshire	62.7
Bassetlaw	62.5
Kensington and Chelsea	62.2
Peterborough	61.9
Northampton	61.7
Hounslow	61.7
London Fire	61.5
Nottingham	61.5
Stevenage	61.3

Authority	*Percentage*
Harlow	61.0
Redcar and Cleveland	60.6
Milton Keynes	60.3
Oxford	60.2
Exeter	60.1

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list for each local authority in England, what the additional business rate would have been if a local business rate had varied by the same percentage in relation to the national business rate as the authority had budgeted for the council tax to vary in relation to CTSS; [38572]

(2) if he will list for each local authority in England which spends above SSA, what the additional business rate poundage would have been *(a)* if the cost of the additional spending above SSA had been borne entirely by local businesses and *(b)* if the cost of additional spending above SSA had been shared equally by local businesses and council tax payers, assuming in each case no change in the local business base. [38576]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today placed in the Library of the House a table showing the information requested.

Council Tax

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list for each local authority what their average council tax in each band would have been if they had budgeted to spend at SSA in 1998–99; [38574]

(2) if he will list for each local authority *(a)* what the band D council tax would have been in 1998–99 with no additional council tax benefit subsidy for any council tax levied above the CTSS and with the changes having equal effect on billing and non-billing authorities and *(b)* how this differs from the actual band D tax levied in 1998–99. [38575]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each local authority the extent to which they are budgeted to spend at, above or below SSA in 1998–99. [38577]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Medicinal Drugs (Children)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has given *(a)* paediatricians and *(b)* general practitioners on the prescription of drugs to children which are not licensed for the treatment of children; and if he will make a statement; [36170]

(2) how many cases have been recorded in each regional health authority in each of the last 10 years, where children have been prescribed treatments which are *(a)* unlicensed for use on children and *(b)* not used in accordance with labelled instructions; [36171]

(3) if he will investigate the extent of the use of unlicensed treatments on children; and if he will make a statement. [36172]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the use in practice of medicines which are not licensed for children is not collected centrally. Doctors have access to clinical guidance on the use of specific medicines which are not licensed for children—to enable them to have sufficient knowledge to take responsibility for treatment. Most medicines prescribed in these circumstances are used in accordance with practice established by specialists in the field, where there is evidence or a sound theoretical basis for the use of the medicine in children and where therapeutic benefit has been established. We do not propose to undertake an investigation but understand the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health is giving this matter further consideration. We shall be guided by any recommendations made by the College.

Osteopathy

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make osteopathy available on the NHS. [38324]

Ms Jowell: Health authorities are able to include osteopathy services within the range of health services commissioned to meet local health needs, if they wish to do so. Availability of osteopathic treatment within the National Health Service depends, therefore, on the decisions taken locally by health authorities and general practitioners about the clinical and cost effectiveness of such services, and the priority to be given to their provision in the light of other competing demands for the resources made available for local health needs.

Health Authority Appointments

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appointments to local health authorities and NHS trusts have been temporarily extended until the end of June. [39285]

Mr. Milburn: The appointment of 283 chairmen and non-executive members of health authorities came to an end on 31 March 1998, 3 had already indicated that they wished to stand down. The remaining 280 were asked to accept a further 3 month appointment until a substantive appointment could be made and 250 have now done so.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of remedial procedures for dealing with suspected pre-cancerous cervical conditions that reduce the likelihood of future pregnancies in the patients treated. [39160]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* There is little evidence to suggest that any form of current treatment for suspected pre-cancerous cervical conditions identified by cervical screening, including destruction of cervical lesions by laser treatment and large loop excision

of the cervical transformation zone, shows a significant adverse effect on fertility or on a woman's risk of having a miscarriage.

AIDS

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will fund research for a vaccination against AIDS. [38765]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health gave on 9 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *57*.

Benzodiazepine

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued for benzodiazepine drugs in the last year for which figures are available; and at what cost. [39282]

Mr. Milburn: 13.9 million prescription items for benzodiazepines were dispensed in the community in England in 1996. The net ingredient cost was £14.7 million.

Hospital Car Parking

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy towards NHS trusts introducing car parking charges on hospital sites; and if he will make a statement. [39313]

Mr. Milburn: Whether or not to charge for parking is a matter for hospitals to decide in the light of local circumstances—for example the space available for car parking and the location of the hospital. Where charges are introduced patients who are eligible to claim reimbursement of travelling expenses under the hospital travel costs scheme may have the charges reimbursed. Good practice guidance on the wider issues surrounding car parking in the National Health Service has been issued to all trusts in Health Facilities Note 21. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Condoms

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy towards the zero-rated VAT status of condoms; and what plans he has to seek to redefine condoms as medicinal devices under European legislation. [39314]

Mr. Milburn: Policy on Value Added Tax is a matter for the Her Majesty's Treasury. Condoms fall within the definition of medical devices under the terms of the European Directive 93/42/EEC which is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Medical Devices Regulations (Statutory Instrument 1994 No. 3017). The UK has no plans to seek to redefine the status of condoms.

National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the sixth annual report of the National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit. [39417]

Mr. Dobson: The National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit's sixth annual report has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. The report documents the Unit's findings in relation to sporadic, familial and iatrogenic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) up to 30 April 1997 and in relation to new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (nvCJD) up to 1 January 1998.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Utility Markets

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *61*, on utility markets, if the utility regulators will be given the same level of investigatory powers as the Office of Fair Trading under the Competition Bill. [38664]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* Yes, in relation to their sectors.

Asteroids

Mr. Öpik: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans she has to increase the funding, over the next four years, to agencies which examine near earth objects; and if he will make a statement; [38954]

(2) what is the total Government provided funding for research into near earth objects in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [38953]

Mr. Battle: In this financial year, the DTI will spend some £50,000 on relevant activity including our contribution to a European Space Agency (ESA) study into improved monitoring of Near Earth Objects (NEOs) from space. In addition, the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) will spend £1.6 million this financial year on instruments for the ESA Rosetta mission. This will land a probe on the comet Wirtanen in 2011 and analyse the internal structure of the comet. Results from this mission are expected to inform work on monitoring and other aspects of the subject.

The Government have no immediate plans for additional activity. Applications to support scientific studies of asteroids may be made to PPARC and will be assessed against other space science priorities.

Utilities (Call-out Charges)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has made to the regulators of utilities with respect to call-out charges. [38767]

Mrs. Beckett: I have made no representations to the regulators of the gas, electricity and telecommunications utilities with respect to call-out charges.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make it her policy to place on the agenda of the next European Energy Council meeting the issue of measures to combat nuclear materials and technology smuggling. [38728]

Mr. Battle: Issues relating to nuclear materials and technology smuggling—export controls, nuclear materials accountancy and control and physical protection—would, by virtue of competence falling to the Community under the Euratom Treaty for nuclear materials accountancy, or because the issues come under discussions held under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, normally fall within the remit of the General Affairs rather than Energy Council.

However, because it is important to continue worldwide efforts to prevent and, when it occurs, combat nuclear materials and technology smuggling, discussion of an agreement on appropriate measures occurs primarily amongst G8 and within the IAEA. The Government believe these wider international fora remain appropriate for ensuring continuing effective collaborative international action.

SCOTLAND

Homophobic Crime

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list those police services in Scotland which monitor and record incidents of homophobic crime; [39209]

(2) if he will list, by police authority, the number of homophobic incidents recorded in each of the last five years; [39210]

(3) what estimate he has made of the under-reporting of homophobic crime; [39211]

(4) if he will list by police authority and by category of offence, the type of offences reported or recorded as homophobic crime. [39214]

Mr. McLeish: Police Forces in Scotland do not record incidents of homophobic crime and from the information collected centrally from police forces, it is not possible to determine offences or incidents of homophobic crime. Consequently, I am not able to make any estimate of under-reporting.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to increase the confidence of homosexual people in reporting crimes against them to the police. [39212]

Mr. McLeish: The police are aware of developing trends in crime and can gear their response accordingly. For example, Lothian & Borders Police, in recognition of attacks against homosexuals, have for some time now had an officer with particular responsibility for liaising with gay and lesbian groups. This approach has encouraged the gay community to come forward with information about assaults which were not hitherto being reported to the police and has allowed the police to respond appropriately. Other Forces are following suit in the light of the scale of the problem in their respective Force areas. We will keep the matter under review in consultation with the Police.

Incapable Adults

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will bring forward proposals for legislation based on the consultation paper, "Managing the Finances and Welfare of Incapable Adults". [38634]

Mr. McLeish: No decision has yet been taken on when we shall be able to bring forward such legislation.

TREASURY

Employment Returns

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of people following his Budget who will have *(a)* increased returns from employment and *(b)* reduced returns from employment; and if he will make a statement. [36378]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 30 March 1998]:* The Budget reformed the tax and benefit system in order to make work pay. It included a number of measures specifically designed to increase the return from work, such as:

- The abolition of the entry fee in employee NICs which will mean all employees earning more than the Lower Earnings Limit will gain £66 per year.
- The Working Family Tax Credit which will guarantee every family working full time an income of at least £180 per week.
- The child care tax credit within WFTC, which will significantly boost in work incomes for many lone parents and two earner couples with children.

Those for whom the tax benefit system presents the greatest disincentive to work will, on average, see the largest increase in their return to work.

Inheritance Tax (Heritage Property)

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the forms of monitoring by *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* other agencies of owners' compliance with the undertaking they make in relation to publicity, access and entry under their terms of conditional exemption from inheritance tax on heritage property; when such monitoring last took place in respect of exempt (i) properties and (ii) works of art in (1) East Sussex, (2) West Sussex and (3) Brighton and Hove local authority areas; and in how many cases over each of the last 10 years exemption has been lost or deferred tax charged as a result of breaches brought to light by this monitoring. [36761]

Dawn Primarolo: Owners' compliance with their undertakings relating to tax exempt land and buildings is monitored on behalf of the Inland Revenue by the appropriate heritage advisory agency. As part of this monitoring, owners have to submit annual reports covering public access, publicity and other conditions of exemption; and there are on-site inspections every five years. In addition, the Inland Revenue separately review all cases at five yearly intervals.

Public access and other conditions relating to exempt works of art and chattels are monitored directly by the Inland Revenue. Each case is reviewed every five years and there is an annual selective audit of objects to which public access is only by prior appointment.

Exempt assets situated in East Sussex and West Sussex, which also cover Brighton and Hove local authority areas, were last monitored in 1997.
Conditional exemption may cease to apply due to various reasons including a sale of the exempt asset or a material failure by the owner to comply with the undertakings.

The number of instances in each of the last ten years when assets have ceased to be conditionally exempt from inheritance tax, or its predecessor, capital transfer tax are as follows. However, the reasons for the exemption ceasing to apply in particular cases are not recorded centrally.

Year	*Number of instances*
1988–89	74
1989–90	85
1990–91	69
1991–92	39
1992–93	37
1993–94	65
1994–95	62
1995–96	70
1996–97	83
1997–98	91

Working Families Tax Credit

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if recipients of working families tax credit will receive the same entitlement to passported benefits as do recipients of family credit. [37851]

Dawn Primarolo: The current assumption is that those who are presently entitled to passported benefits because they receive Family Credit will continue to be entitled to such benefits when the WFTC is introduced.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of introducing a working families tax credit on *(a)* the level of employment and *(b)* the control total in the next four years. [38219]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 April 1998]:* The Government expect that their programme of tax and benefit reform to make work pay will, like its New Deals, help people move off welfare and into work.

Whether or not any part of the WFTC should score in the Control Total has not yet been decided.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *553–54*, on the working families tax credit, in estimating the cost of the working families tax credit, how many recipients of *(a)* the working families tax credit and *(b)* the childcare tax credit are assessed in the cost estimates for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [39235]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* Around 800,000 families are currently in receipt of family credit; it is estimated that about 400,000 more families will be eligible for the Working Families Tax Credit.

Personal Allowances

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the *(a)* cost in 1998–99 and *(b)* full year cost of revalorising (i) the non-aged personal allowance, (ii) the personal allowance for those between 65 and 74 years and (iii) the personal allowance for those aged 75 years and over. [39291]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimated costs are given in the table.

£ million

	Full year cost at 1998–99 income levels	*First year cost at 1998–99 income levels*
Indexing the personal allowance:		
For those aged:		
Under 65	860	640
65–74	70	50
75+	40	30

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the full year cost of transferring from a married person to their earning spouse an unused personal tax allowance where the former cares for an elderly or dependent relative; and if he will give this figure both on the basis that the married couples allowance *(a)* is and *(b)* is not, also given in these cases. [39289]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to provide reliable estimates.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) by what amount the real value of the under 65 years married couples allowance will have fallen between 1990–91 and *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000 taking account of the reductions in the rate at which the allowance is given and assuming that the allowance is increased in 1999–2000 in line with inflation; [39293]

(2) by how much the real value of the personal allowance will have increased between 1990–91 and *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000 assuming that it is increased in line with inflation in 1999–2000. [39292]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is given in the tables. These compare the level of the 1990–91 revalorised personal allowance and married couple's allowance against the actual level in 1998–99 and 1999–2000. It is assumed that allowances in 1999–2000 are indexed in line with an illustrative assumption of 3¼ per cent. given in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", March 1998.

£

Year	*1990–91 revalorised level*	*Actual level*	*Increase in level*
Personal allowance (aged under 65)			
1998–99	4,035	4,195	160
1999–2000	4,165	4,335	170
Married couple's allowance (aged under 65)			
1998–99	2,310	1,900	—
1999–2000	2,390	1,970	—

£

Year	1990–91 revalorised value[1] Lower rate taxpayer	Basic rate taxpayer	Higher rate taxpayer	Actual value[2]	Reduction in value Lower rate taxpayer	Basic rate taxpayer	Higher rate taxpayer
1998–99	462	531	924	285	177	246	639
1999–2000	478	550	956	197	281	353	759

[1] MCA given at marginal rates.
[2] MCA given at 15 per cent. in 1998–99 and 10 per cent. in 1999–2000.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the full year cost of giving all married people the option of transferring an unused personal tax allowance to their earning spouse; and if he will give this figure both on the basis that the married couples allowance *(a)* is and *(b)* is not also given in these cases. [39288]

Dawn Primarolo: The full year cost in 1998–99 of allowing married couples to transfer their unused personal allowance to their spouse is estimated to be £3.2 billion. However, if couples were given the choice between transferring their unused personal allowances but losing their MCA, or keeping their MCA and not transferring, the cost would be £2.1 billion.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the full year cost of transferring from a married person to their earning spouse an unused personal tax allowance where that person's youngest child is *(a)* under five, *(b)* under 11 and *(c)* under 16 years at the beginning of the tax year; and if he will give these figures both on the basis that the married couples allowance (i) is and (ii) is not, also given in these cases. [39290]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated cost of allowing married couples with children to transfer their unused personal allowance to their spouse are given in the table.

Full year cost at 1998–99 income levels

£ billion

	Assuming married couple's allowance is retained	Assuming married couple's allowance is not given[1]
Married couples where youngest child is:		
Under 5	0.8	0.6
Under 11	1.1	0.8
Under 16	1.3	0.9

[1] Couples are given the choice between transferring their unused personal allowance but losing their married couple's allowance (MCA), or keeping their MCA and not transferring.

European Investment Bank

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the *(a)* total and *(b)* yearly level of loan facilities provided by the European Investment Bank to the United Kingdom since 1993; and what are the corresponding figures for each other EU member state. [38889]

Mrs. Liddell: The table shows the total finance contracts signed (including individual and global loans) for the UK and other EU Member States for each year from 1993–1997 and in total.

mecu

Country	Finance contracts signed 1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	Total
UK	1,929	2,455	2,244	2,386	3,765	12,779
Belgium	372	615	665	657	1,140	3,449
Denmark	876	850	825	688	737	3,976
Germany	2,097	2,408	2,715	3,022	3,518	13,760
Greece	511	535	525	721	730	3,022
Spain	4,005	3,011	2,817	2,553	2,716	15,102
France	2,206	2,477	2,207	2,509	2,721	12,120
Ireland	388	291	327	189	207	1,402
Italy	3,362	3,100	3,453	4,121	3,517	17,553
Luxembourg	—	5	79	—	96	180
Netherlands	378	400	319	766	398	2,261
Austria	73	90	242	490	555	1,450
Portugal	1,489	1,110	1,232	1,294	1,350	6,475
Finland	—	60	179	302	401	942
Sweden	—	15	273	847	925	2,060

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Inland Revenue definition of millennium conversion expenditure used for taxation purposes; and to what extent the definition includes expenditure on the development of new systems. [39153]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax regime provides that only those expenses which are revenue, not capital, in nature and which are incurred wholly and exclusively for business purposes may be allowed as a deduction when calculating trading profits for tax purposes. The Inland Revenue view is that an in-house or contracted out software project to ensure that existing systems can be

adapted for the millennium will always be a revenue matter unless it is part of a major new project instituting other changes and the project is of a capital nature. Small and medium businesses will benefit from the accelerated first year allowances announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget.

Inland Revenue (Child Care)

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the definition of workplace provision of childcare used by the Inland Revenue in determining whether contributions to childcare qualify as benefits in kind. [39149]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax treatment of child care benefits is explained in the Inland Revenue leaflet IR115 "Tax and Childcare". An article in issue 34 of the Inland Revenue's Tax Bulletin magazine, published on 20 April sets out the Inland Revenue's view on what is required to satisfy the conditions of the workplace nursery exemption (Section 155A ICTA 1988) where an employer gets together with others to provide child care.

Oxford Economic Forecasts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the key assumptions used in the model of Oxford Economic Forecasts. [38888]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury monitors over 40 independent forecasts of the UK economy and periodically reviews aspects of the models used by the major forecasting institutions, including Oxford Economic Forecasting.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the planned expenditure on anti-smuggling, set out at table 3, page 19 of HM Customs and Excise Departmental report, 1998, (Cm 3918) is allocated to combat nuclear materials smuggling. [38730]

Dawn Primarolo: Planned expenditure on combating the smuggling of nuclear materials is included in the figures for Protection of Society in table 4 of page 28 of the Report (table 3 deals with UK revenue). This expenditure relates to the integral control of a wide range of prohibited and restricted items. I regret that it is not possible to disaggregate a figure for specific goods.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many instances of the smuggling into the United Kingdom of illicit nuclear materials have been detected since 1990. [38726]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs have detected no instances of the smuggling into the United Kingdom of illicit nuclear materials during the period since 1990.

Herbal Stimulants

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the herbal stimulants that are *(a)* regarded as food products and are zero rated for VAT and *(b)* regarded as stimulants and are subject to the standard rate of VAT; [38622]

(2) what criteria are used to determine which herbal products are classed as food products and which as stimulants. [38623]

Dawn Primarolo: A list of herbal stimulants is not held centrally, but the general rule for VAT purposes is that herbs supplied for culinary use are zero-rated. Decisions on the liability of herbal stimulants and remedies are taken case by case if they fall outside the guidance given in Customs and Excise VAT Notice 701/38, which sets out the liability of seeds and plants. The test is whether or not they are "food of a kind use for human consumption" within the normal meaning of those words.

Budgets (Environmental Assessments)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 622, what plans he has to improve the methods used for the environmental assessment of budget measures for future budgets. [38823]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The Government will review the environmental assessment of Budget measures in time to inform future Budgets.

Tax Evasion (Hackney)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to tackle tax evasion in the London Borough of Hackney. [38646]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The tax Departments have continuing programmes of counter-evasion work which cover all parts of the United Kingdom. Resources are deployed to detect evasion across the tax system with an emphasis on areas of high tax risk.

Earnings

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of people aged *(a)* 21 years and under and *(b)* 25 years and under who earn less than (i) £3.50 per hour and (ii) £4 per hour; what percentage of the working population this represents; and if he will make a statement. [38966]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Lembit Opik, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on hourly earnings.

This information is shown in the attached table using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Work is being undertaken to assess the quality of earnings data from the LFS and the New Earnings Survey (NES). Current indications are that the LFS provides the more reliable estimates of workers on low pay, but nevertheless tends to overestimate the proportion of low paid workers. The figures in the table should therefore be taken as upper estimates of the proportions. Details of this assessment of the quality of earnings data are expected to be published in the May issue of *Labour Market Trends*, copies of which will be available from the House of Commons Library.

Employees aged 16–21 and 16–25 earning less than £3.50 and £4.00 per hour. United Kingdom, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted

	Aged 16–21	*Aged 16–25*
Earning under £3.50 per hour		
Total (thousands)	994	1,278
As % of all employees in age group	47.3	30.5
As % of all working age[1] employees	4.5	5.8
Earnings under £4.00 per hour		
Total (thousands)	1,314	1,793
As % of all employees in age group	62.5	42.8
As % of all working age[1] employees	5.9	8.1

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Labour Statistics

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the average weekly hours worked by *(a)* male and *(b)* female part-time workers, giving figures separately for married and unmarried workers. [38858]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for the average hours worked by part-time employees broken down by sex and marital status.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS):

Average total usual weekly hours[1] of employees working part-time, by sex and marital status, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted, United Kingdom

	All persons	*Married/ cohabiting*	*Others*
All persons	18.6	19.6	16.3
Males	17.5	20.0	16.1
Females	18.8	19.6	16.4

[1] Includes paid and unpaid overtime. Excludes meal breaks.

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what are the average weekly hours of work for *(a)* male, *(b)* female, *(c)* full-time and *(d)* part-time workers, and their average hours of overtime work, giving figures separately for workers (i) with dependent children aged over five years, (ii) with dependent children aged under five years and (iii) with no dependent children; [38851]

(2) what percentages of *(a)* men and *(b)* women with (i) dependent children over age five, (ii) dependent children under age five and (iii) no children, work (1) full-time and (2) part-time; and what are their average weekly hours of work. [38856]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions (38851 and 38856) asking about the overtime and total hours worked by employees broken down by sex and age of youngest child.

This information is shown in the attached table using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Please note that the overtime figures are averaged over all employees, not just those who work overtime.

Weekly hours of work by age of youngest dependent child for full-time and part time-employees by sex. United Kingdom, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted

Employees with:	*No dependent children*		*Youngest child aged 0–4*		*Youngest child aged 5+*	
	Full time	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*
Male:						
Percentage working full/part-time	90.7	9.3	96.9	3.1	97.4	2.6
Average total usual hours[1] worked	45.2	17.0	46.8	19.6	47.0	20.9
Average basic usual hours worked	40.7	15.8	41.3	18.4	41.6	19.9
Average total usual overtime[2]	4.6	1.2	5.4	1.2	5.4	1.0
Female:						
Percentage working full/part-time	68.8	31.2	36.0	63.9	41.4	58.6
Average total usual hours worked[1]	41.2	18.5	39.9	18.2	40.4	19.4
Average basic usual hours worked	38.0	17.3	37.2	17.1	36.8	17.9
Average total usual overtime[2]	3.1	1.2	2.7	1.2	3.6	1.5

[1] Includes paid and unpaid overtime, excludes meal breaks

[2] Paid and unpaid overtime derived by subtracting basic hours from total hours

Source:
Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the numbers and percentages of *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees who are classed as homeworkers; and what is the breakdown by (i) industry and (ii) occupation. [38852]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking about employee homeworkers.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Homeworkers are defined as those who work mainly in their own home.

Employee homeworkers by sex, industry and occupations, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted, United Kingdom, per cent

	All persons	*Males*	*Females*
All employee homeworkers (thousands)	194	47	147
Percentage of all employees	0.9	0.4	1.4
Employee homeworkers by industry (per cent)			
Agriculture, fishing, energy & water supply, manufacturing	20.9	23.7	20.0
Construction	9.5	[1]—	12.3
All service industries	69.6	75.4	67.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Employee homeworkers by occupation (per cent)			
Managers and administrators	22.5	43.1	15.9
Professional, associate professional and technical occupations	12.5	28.1	7.4
Clerical, secretarial occupations	38.2	[1]—	48.3
Personal, protective occupations	12.0	[1]—	13.8
All other occupations	14.9	[1]—	14.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Numerator less than 10,000: figure too small for reliable estimate

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are employed under a flexi-time contract, giving figures separately for workers (i) with dependent children aged over five years, (ii) with dependent children aged under five years and (iii) with no dependent children. [38848]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for a breakdown of people employed under a flexi-time contract.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Please note that this table is based on employees who say they work flexi-time. Working flexi-time does not necessarily imply a contractual obligation.

Employees working flexi-time by sex and age of youngest dependent child, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted, United Kingdom, thousands

	All persons	*Male*	*Female*
All employees	2,321	1,057	1,263
With dependent children aged:			
5 and over	525	222	303
Under 5	367	171	195
With no dependent children	1,430	664	764

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women work only during school terms, giving figures separately for (i) those directly employed in education and (ii) other workers. [38849]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking about employees who only work during school terms.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). It is based on employees who classify themselves as term time workers. Employees who work college or university terms, not just those who work school terms, will be included.

Employees working in term time, by sex and industry, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted, United Kingdom, thousands

	Employed in education	*Other employees*
All persons	774	177
Males	139	16
Females	634	159

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the number and percentage of jobs which are done on a job-share basis; and what percentage of job-shares are done by *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [38853]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking about jobs done on a job-share basis.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The table is based on the numbers of employees who work on a job-share basis rather than the number of such jobs.

Employees sharing jobs by sex, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted, United Kingdom, thousands and per cent.

	All persons	*Males*	*Females*
Employees in job shares:			
thousands	177	18	158
per cent.	100	10	89
Employees in job shares as a percentage of all employees	0.8	0.2	1.5

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees worked part-time in (i) 1970, (ii) 1980, (iii) 1990 and (iv) the most recent available date; and what were their average hours of work. [38859]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking about part-time employees in various years.

This information is shown in the table below using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which are only available on a consistent basis from 1984 onwards.

Part-time employees by sex, average total usual hours of work, United Kingdom, not seasonally adjusted, Spring (1984, 1990, 1997)

	1984	*1990*	*1997*
Males			
P/t male employees as a percentage of all male employees	2.6	3.8	7.5
Average usual weekly hours of work[1]	16.5	15.4	16.7
Females			
P/t female employees as a percentage of all female employees	42.3	41.1	42.9
Average usual weekly hours of work[1]	18.3	18.0	18.4

[1] Includes paid and unpaid overtime, excludes meal breaks.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information in table 5 of Labour Market Trends, January 1997, volume 105, no. 1, p.LFS5. [38857]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for an update of table 5 of *Labour Market Trends*, January 1997.

An update of this table was published in *Labour Market Trends*, April 1998, volume 106, no. 4, p.LFS20, a copy of which is enclosed. Copies of *Labour Market Trends* are available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the breakdown of the numbers of *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees working part-time by (i) marital status and (ii) industry. [38860]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for a breakdown of employees working part-time by sex, marital status and industry.

This information is shown in the table, using estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Part-time employees by sex, industry and marital status, Autumn 1997, not seasonally adjusted, Great Britain, thousands

	Male		*Female*	
	Married/ cohabiting	*Other*	*Married/ cohabiting*	*Other*
All industries[1]	297	545	3,337	1,187
Agriculture and fishing	[2]—	[2]—	18	[2]—
Energy and water	[2]—	[2]—	10	[2]—
Manufacturing	32	32	215	44
Construction	10	[2]—	48	[2]—
Distribution, hotels and restaurants	60	333	885	615
Transport and communication	34	23	93	24
Banking, finance and insurance etc.	35	35	386	79
Public administration, education and health	92	59	1,492	309
Other services	31	51	187	100

[1] Includes those who did not specify their industry and those whose workplace is outside the UK.
[2] Sample size too small to provide a reliable estimate.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Abortions (Barnet)

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions were carried out on residents of the London Borough of Barnet in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many of these were *(a)* carried out in the NHS and *(b)* paid for by the NHS under an agency agreement. [39052]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Rudi Vis, dated 22 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on abortions in Barnet.

The information for residents of Barnet health authority is available in Table 22 for 1994, and Table 21 for 1995 and 1996 in the ONS Abortion Statistics publication, Series AB Nos. 21–23 for 1994 to 1996. These publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the rate of exchange for sterling's entry to EMU will be determined. [39326]

Mrs. Liddell: In accordance with Protocol 11 of the Treaty on European Union, the UK Government have informed the Council that they do not intend to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union on 1 January 1999. The Government will consider the question of how the exchange rate for sterling's entry to EMU will be determined if and when we decide to join.

Financial Services

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how the forthcoming legislation reforming the regulatory system for financial services will affect the role of auditors and actuaries. [39559]

Mrs. Liddell: The relationship between auditors, actuaries and the regulators is an important feature of the supervisory system in the UK. The financial services regulators take into account the role and responsibilities of both auditors and actuaries when determining the appropriate nature and intensity of regulatory supervision both at firm and industry level. I intend that the proposed new legislation to be published in the Summer will build on, and strengthen, this special relationship.

As now, the Financial Services Authority (FSA) will continue to be able to make rules requiring authorised firms to appoint an auditor where they are not already under a duty to do so. The legislation will also allow the FSA to make rules regarding the appointment of actuaries on the same basis. Where there is a need for an investigation or report on any aspect of an authorised firm's business, the FSA will continue to be able to either appoint, or require firms to use the services of, a qualified auditor, actuary or other professional.

I also propose that the FSA's current powers to sanction auditors should be extended to cover actuaries. This will allow the FSA to disqualify an auditor or actuary from being the auditor or actuary of any firm regulated by the FSA for a specified period where they have failed to inform the regulator about matters of regulatory concern uncovered in the course of their duties. The provisions which disapply any confidentiality requirements an auditor might breach in passing on such information would also be extended to actuaries. Although I would expect this to be a little used power, it is vital that the FSA should be able to rely on auditors and actuaries, with their expertise and special access to information, to let them know of any such concerns.

Bank of England

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the Bank's power to collect information for monetary policy purposes. [39560]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government's Response to consultation on the Bank's power to collect information for monetary policy purposes is published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Most respondents welcomed the move to a statutory basis for the Banks collection of information for monetary policy purposes. They acknowledged that as it was intended largely to place the existing scheme on a statutory basis, it did not imply any increase in costs for the foreseeable future.

The Government also assured respondents that the Bank would continue to consult on any major changes to the statistical system. The Government are concerned to ensure that the cost of supplying statistical information is kept to a minimum, consistent with meeting the information needs of the Bank. And the Act also requires the Treasury to consult appropriate representative institutions if any changes are proposed to the range of financial affairs, or to the categories of institutions from which information can be collected.

EU Budget

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the statement on the 1998 Community Budget; and if he will make a statement. [39612]

Mrs. Liddell: I have today laid before Parliament the Statement on the 1998 Community Budget, entitled "European Community Finances". This White Paper is the eighteenth in the series. As in the past, it covers annual budgetary matters and includes details of recent developments in European Community financial management and in countering fraud against the Community Budget. It also describes the Community Budget for 1998 as adopted by the European Parliament, and the United Kingdom's gross and net contributions to the Community Budget between 1995 and 1998.

I have placed copies of the White Paper in both Libraries of the House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Publications

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those European Commission *(a)* newsletters, *(b)* magazines and *(c)* occasional publications to which his Department subscribes. [33666]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This Department subscribes to such European Commission newsletters, magazines and other publications as are necessary to support its work.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those compliance cost assessments published during the latest six month period. [39443]

Dr. David Clark: The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, give effective protection, balance cost and risk, are fair and command public confidence. In accordance with this, we require Departments to produce and publish CCAs for all regulatory proposals likely to have an impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector.

I have presented to Parliament today a Command Paper listing 77 CCAs and regulatory appraisals incorporating CCAs published between 1 July 1997 and 31 December 1997. This is the eighth such Command Paper.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EU Development Assistance

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on access to information about EU aid projects. [38439]

Clare Short: The Commission and the Council are committed to the principle of allowing the public the widest possible access to documents held by the Commission and Council. Details on how to access information are contained in the Code of Conduct concerning public access to Commission and Council documents. This covers all types of information about a project, but does contain a list of exceptions—documents considered commercially or politically sensitive do not need to be released. This can include some aid documentation such as aid strategy agreements with third countries and project financing proposals put to the Management Committees (whose dealings are confidential).

All commercial tenders (whether restricted or open) have to be published in the Official Journal which is available on the Internet: by this means a lot of information about aid projects is put into the public domain. The Commission is generally regarded as getting better at improving its efforts to provide information in this area too. However, although the principles on releasing information are the same across all the external relations Directorates General (DG) each can interpret them differently. This can cause confusion, but the establishment of the Common Services Directorate (SCOOP) should help to standardise procedures and increase transparency. There are also designated information officers in each DG for the public to contact.

Refugee Camps (Abortion)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the health implications of the use of manual vacuum aspiration for elective abortions in refugee camps; and if she will make it her policy that manual vacuum aspiration for elective abortions should not be used in such circumstances. [38638]

Clare Short: Where permitted by law and provided in line with appropriate medical practice, manual vacuum aspiration (MVA) can have a useful role in protecting the health of a woman who seeks to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. MVA is also a valuable technique for treating incomplete abortions, whether spontaneous or induced.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *391*, to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), for how long the review of the secure estate for juveniles has been in progress; and what is his current estimate of when the review will be published. [38579]

Mr. Michael: An initial review of juvenile secure accommodation has been undertaken as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The review began in September and was completed at the end of March. The Government are now considering the outcome of the review and expect to make a statement shortly. My right hon. Friend has made clear the Government's intention of bringing coherence to the secure estate while achieving greater flexibility and effectiveness in the use of the secure estate and this will require a good deal of detailed work. Our plans were set out in the White Paper "No More Excuses—A New Approach to Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales", (Cm 3809, November 1997).

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of secure accommodation for young offenders. [38532]

Mr. Michael: Juveniles who are held in custody on remand or sentenced can be placed in secure accommodation provided by the local authority or by central Government in Prison Service facilities, Secure Training Centres or in the Youth Treatment Centre.

The Government have undertaken an initial review of secure accommodation for juveniles as part of their Comprehensive Spending Review. This looked at the whole range of secure accommodation for children and young people. The Government are now considering the outcome of the review and expect to make a statement shortly.

My right hon. Friend has made clear the Government's intention of bringing coherence to the secure estate, while achieving greater flexibility and effectiveness in the use of the secure estate and this will require a good deal of detailed work. Our plans were set out in the White Paper "No More Excuses—A New Approach to Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales", (Cm 3809, November 1997).

Home Office Circulars

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Home Office circulars issued to *(a)* police forces, *(b)* police authorities and *(c)* the Association of Chief Police officers, in each of the last three years. [38662]

Mr. Michael: Home Office circulars are issued directly by the Home Office, not by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). Guidance issued by ACPO is a matter for them. Circulars to the police were issued by the Home Office in 1995, 1996 and 1997 and copies of each have been placed in the Library.

Police (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish Dr. Simon Holdaway's Home Office-funded report on why ethnic minority police officers were resigning prematurely; [39169]

(2) if he will implement the conclusions of the Home Office-funded report on the racialisation of the British police. [39171]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The report by Dr. Simon Holdaway and Dr. Anne-Marie Barron was published independently last year by Macmillan Press Limited under the title "Resigners? The experience of Black and Asian Officers".

The decision that the report would not be published by the Home Office was taken in 1993. Its findings will be borne in mind. We are well aware of the need to ensure the retention of police officers from ethnic minorities and considerable work is being undertaken in the Home Office to understand the issues involved and to develop guidance for the police service in England and Wales.

The recent thematic report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary is particularly helpful and chief police officers have been asked to consider how best to respond to its findings as a matter of urgency.

Parliamentary Boundary Commission (Wales)

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to appoint to the two vacant posts of Commissioner at the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales. [39663]

Mr. George Howarth: I am very pleased to announce that I have appointed Professor Kenneth George to serve as a Commissioner to fill one post and that my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales, has appointed Mrs. Susan Smith as a Commissioner to fill the other. Both appointments are effective until 31 December 2001.

Positional Asphyxia

Mr. Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has obtained supporting the statement by the Director General of the Prison Service, broadcast on "Newsnight" on 25 March, concerning the relative likelihood of persons of Afro-Caribbean origins and persons of other ethnic origins suffering from positional asphyxia; and if he will publish this evidence. [39664]

Mr. Straw: An internal Prison Service report dated February 1996 identified a range of medical factors that would be likely to place an individual at greater risk of sudden death when being physically restrained and therefore liable to suffer from positional asphyxia. These include sickle cell disorders which more frequently occur in persons originating from regions of Africa or the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and India. This is a difficult area with differing expert views. The Prison Service will be commissioning further research into these important issues.

I am placing a copy of the report in the Library. Since the report had not originally been intended for publication, sections which identify personal information about specific individuals have been removed.

Homosexual Panic Defence

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the report of the New South Wales Attorney General's Department into the homosexual panic defence; and if he will make a statement. [39216]

Mr. Michael: The Attorney General's Department of New South Wales issued a discussion paper in August 1996 entitled a "Review of the 'Homosexual Advance Defence'". The paper reviews recent cases in New South Wales and discusses the use of the defence where it is pleaded as part of a defence of self defence or provocation. It did not recommend any legislative changes in New South Wales, but suggested some changes in the model directions for judges, and greater education within the criminal justice system and the wider community. I understand a final report will be published in due course, and I await that with interest.

Homophobic Crime

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list those police services in England which monitor and record incidents of homophobic crime; [39204]

(2) what estimate he has made of the under-reporting of homophobic crime; [39206]

(3) if he will list by police authority and by category of offence, the types of offences reported or recorded as homophobic crime; [39213]

(4) if he will list, by police authority, the number of homophobic incidents recorded in each of the last five years. [39205]

Mr. Michael: From the information collected centrally, it is not possible to determine offences or incidents of homophobic crime which, like a number of other identifiable categories such as domestic violence or

violence between neighbours, cut across different categories of offence depending on the seriousness of the event or the nature of the evidence. Whilst the Home Office collects statistics on the number of recorded offences of, for example, violence against the person, indecent assault on a male, indecency between males and rape of a male, there is no way of identifying which offences within any offence type had a homophobic element. This makes it impossible to give a proper estimate concerning under-reporting.

In 1996, the Association of Chief Police Officers published a set of Good Practice Guidelines for Dealing with Homophobic Incidents. This included a definition of what should be regarded as a homophobic incident: "Any incident which appears to either the victim, investigating officer or any other person to be motivated by homophobia, that is, animosity towards lesbians and gay men". The guidelines also recommended that police forces should record and monitor such incidents.

A literature review has been conducted for the interdepartmental working group on vulnerable and intimidated witnesses; part of the report examined literature on hate crimes against sexual minorities. This report is being considered by Ministers.

There have been a few surveys published. For example, in a survey of gay men carried out in Lewisham as part of the Lewisham Safer Cities project in 1992, the vast majority reported experience of verbal abuse (81 per cent.) and approaching half reported being physically attacked. Property offences were less commonly reported.

Stonewall, the pressure group which campaigns for the civil rights of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, has also carried out a nation-wide survey. Key findings included:

three quarters reported experiencing verbal abuse on at least one occasion;

over a third of men and a quarter of women reported experiencing violence in the last five years because of their sexuality;

some groups, such as black, Asian, disabled and young respondents had greater risk of victimisation.

Both studies found repeat victimisation was common. They provide useful information, although it must be acknowledged that they may not provide a representative sample.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to increase the confidence of homosexual people in reporting crimes against them to the police. [39207]

Mr. Michael: The reluctance of homosexual people to report crimes committed against them was one of the issues raised in the report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's thematic inspection into police community and race relations published last October. The report recommended that forces should establish policies and strategies for the policing of incidents and crimes against the gay community, acknowledging their vulnerability as a minority group, and establish systems and practices to deal effectively with homophobic attacks including monitoring arrangements. Her Majesty's Inspectorate will be looking at what forces have done to implement the report during their programme of force inspections.

The Association of Chief Police Officers has published good practice guidelines which aim to ensure that effective means are in place to monitor, detect and prevent such incidents.

Consultation with gay and lesbian groups is recognised as an important means by which police officers can gain an understanding of the problems and issues that exist for lesbians and gay men, thereby engendering trust between that community and the police. The crime audits which the police and local agencies will be obliged to carry out under the Crime and Disorder Bill proposals will provide the means to get gay and lesbian issues onto the community safety agenda. The extensive guidance which will accompany the legislation will include references to the importance of involving these groups in this process.

Police Drivers (Training)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are given to police authorities on the *(a)* type and *(b)* amount of special training that must be given to police officers before they are allowed to drive police vehicles in emergency situations. [38538]

Mr. Michael: The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has provided forces with detailed guidelines on police driver training. ACPO's police driving report published in May 1989, made recommendations on the grading of drivers and the core elements and minimum lengths of training courses. Such training is progressive and is designed to develop the skills of drivers so that they increase their awareness of the range of factors that affect their own training, their own capabilities, the characteristics of the vehicles they drive, and road and traffic conditions. However, it is ultimately for individual chief constables to determine the extent of training received by their officers and how they are deployed.

Under current arrangements, officers attend Standard or Advanced driver training courses either in-force or regionally. They progress from Standard to Advanced driver training through patrol experience and driver ability.

Driver training is based on "Roadcraft", a published manual available to the public, the 1989 police driving report and the Horner Report of 1995 on pursuits. Following the death of Judith Hood, killed as a result of a collision with a police car driven by a driving instructor on a training exercise, ACPO set up a working party to examine police pursuit driving training. The working group has examined the recommendations of both the 1989 and 1995 reports which it considers to be good practice but the group has yet to complete its work. The key issue is the need to train officers so they are capable of understanding modern road conditions and exercise all due care when travelling at speeds and in conditions beyond those experienced by the general motorist. Attitudes of police drivers and computerised driver simulator training are key areas currently being explored by the working group.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend section 14 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. [38902]

Mr. Michael: The future of all the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, including section 14, and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1996 and 1998, is currently under consideration. The Government's thinking will be set out in the forthcoming consultation paper on permanent United Kingdom-wide counter-terrorism legislation.

Wireless Telegraphy

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provisions contained in Part III of the Police Act 1997 relating to actions with respect to property and wireless telegraphy. [38903]

Mr. Michael: We intend to implement the provisions contained in Part III of the Police Act 1997 as quickly as possible. Detailed work is continuing on a number of points relating to the appointment of Commissioners and the practical arrangements necessary to support their work. We intend to lay the draft code of practice on intrusive surveillance before Parliament during the Summer.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of each of the various components of disability living allowance there are in the Seaham and Peterlee areas. [37897]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 21 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many recipients of each of the various components of Disability Living Allowance there are in the Seaham and Peterlee areas.

The information requested is provided in the following table. The figures have been obtained by analysing the claims of customers living within postcodes in the Seaham and Peterlee areas. Source: Analytical Services Division, 5% data. The figures are provisional and subject to change.

Recipients of disability living allowance in Seaham and Peterlee:

Components	*Number*
All awards	11,000
Care Components:	
Higher rate care	1,700
Middle rate care	2,300
Lower rate care	2,900
Mobility Components:	
Higher rate mobility	8,500
Lower rate mobility	1,500

I hope that this is helpful.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reviews of disability living allowance awards were requested by recipients during each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98; and what was the average time between the request and the review decision being made. [39217]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Reviews of disability living allowance decisions

	Total review requests	*Average time from request to review decision (days)*
1995–96	344,100	44
1996–97	375,107	49
1997–98	354,732	52

Notes:
1. Figures relate to reviews initiated by the claimant.
2. Some decisions relate to requests received in the previous year.
3. Figures relate to decisions where a disallowed claim for benefit was allowed on review or where the amount or duration of a previous award has been increased.

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reviews of disability living allowance awards during each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 were requested *(a)* within three months of the original decision and *(b)* at any time broken down by reviews initiated by (i) the claimant and (ii) the Benefits Agency; and how many in each case were found in the claimant's favour. [39218]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Reviews of disability living allowance decisions

Review decisions	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Reviews requested within three months of the original decision			
Requests received	172,914	199,705	201,632
Decisions in the claimant's favour[1,2]	64,100	67,112	67,894
Reviews requested after three months of the original decision			
Requests received	171,186	175,402	173,100
Decisions in the claimant's favour[1,2]	82,666	76,643	66,469

[1] Some decisions relate to requests received in the previous year.
[2] Figures relate to decisions where a disallowed claim for benefit was allowed on review or where the amount or duration of a previous award has been increased.

Note:
Figures relate to reviews initiated by the claimant.

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data.

Reviews of disability living allowance

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Total initiated by claimant	138,000	135,400	122,600
In claimant's favour[1]	119,200	116,500	103,000
Total initiated by Secretary of State	4,000	3,400	8,800
In claimant's favour[1]	3,000	2,700	8,100

[1] Benefit awarded for the first time or amount and/or duration of award increased.

Notes:
1. Figures relate to 12 month period ending February.
2. This table does not include new and repeat claims where benefit was originally disallowed; or cases where benefit was terminated on review.

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. data.

Disability Working Allowance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many disability working allowance renewal forms were returned to claimants because they arrived too early during February and March; and if she will make a statement; [38113]

(2) what estimate she has made of the number of DWA forms that were returned because they arrived too early, separately identifying the costs of *(a)* staff time and *(b)* postage; and if she will make a statement. [38114]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of Disability Working Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Joan Walley, dated 21 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many Disability Working Allowance (DWA) renewal forms were returned to claimants because they arrived too early during February and March, and what estimate she has made of the number of forms that were returned because they arrived too early, separately identifying the costs of (a) staff time and (b) postage.

The number of DWA renewal forms returned to claimants because they arrived too early during February and March 1998 was 222.

The estimated cost of staff time and postage incurred in returning DWA claims because they arrived too early during February and March has been estimated at £7.59 per case or a total of £1,684.98.

I hope that this is helpful.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in Sunderland received *(a)* £50, *(b)* £20 and *(c)* £10 winter fuel payments in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [37973]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in winter. A total of £400 million has been committed for two years (1997–98 and 1998–99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay. This is the first time any Government have provided additional help with heating costs to all pensioners living in the United Kingdom who receive a retirement pension or one of a number of other qualifying benefits.

The making of this year's payments has been an enormous and unprecedented exercise. In order to establish all eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data in around 15 million computer records, involving 15 qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Overall, almost 10 million pensioners, in over 7 million households, have received a payment.

The administration of winter fuel payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 21 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many pensioners in Sunderland received (a) £50, (b) £20 and (c) £10 winter fuel payments in the last year for which figures are available.

The making of winter fuel payments to almost ten million eligible pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 has been a challenging task for the Benefits Agency (BA). This will have been achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

Around one and a half million of the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA(IB)), received their payment of £50 during January. Other eligible pensioners are entitled to a payment of £20 or £10. Where they live alone, are the only eligible pensioner in a household, or are of no fixed abode, they are entitled to £20; otherwise, they are entitled to £10, including each person in a pensioner couple if they are both in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Not all of the information requested is available. The BA collates IS and JSA(IB) statistics by BA District Office. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or this specific geographical area. Such information as is available relates to the number of instances in the Wearside BA District (which includes the offices of Houghton-le-Spring, Seaham and Wearside) where we made a £50 payment. A total of 11,187 £50 payments were made during January 1998 following a scan of each of the benefit computer systems. It is likely that a small number of additional payments will also have been made where entitlement was identified locally due to the eligible pensioner's details not being held on the computer system at the time the scans were done. This information is provisional and may be subject to change.

Information relating to all other pensioners who received payments of £20 or £10 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the position.

Benefit Integrity Project

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were, for each relevant year to date, the numbers of people dealt with by the benefit integrity project at the Bolton office for *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit, and the outcomes in terms of retention of or loss of benefit. [38426]

Mr. Denham: The Benefit Integrity Project aims to ensure that those in receipt of Disability Living Allowance are entitled to it. While it is right to check that people are receiving the correct amount of benefit, we are determined that those checks should be undertaken as sensitively as possible. We also must ensure that all decisions taken as a result of the project are right. We have, therefore, acted to introduce an extra safeguard to improve the quality of, and the confidence in, benefit decisions made by the Project.

The administration of the Benefit Integrity Project is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Brian Iddon, dated 21 April 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what were, for each relevant year to date, the numbers of people dealt with by the Benefit Integrity Project at the Bolton office for (a) Disability Living Allowance and (b) Incapacity Benefit, and the outcomes in terms of retention of or loss of benefit.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Benefit Integrity Project (BIP) is a programme of postal enquiries and home visits to seek up to date information about the care and mobility needs of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) customers receiving the higher rate mobility component with either the middle or highest rate care component. The BIP does not affect any benefit other than DLA.

DLA is administered centrally at the Disability Benefits Unit in Blackpool and eleven regional Disability Benefit Centres. As at 31 January 1998, a total of 54,839 cases have been examined as part of the BIP. Of these 1,299 people have had their benefit increased, 42,730 have remained unchanged, 6,884 have had their benefit reduced and 3,926 have had their benefit stopped. The total includes 10,811 renewal cases: of which 334 had their benefit increased, 5,601 remain unchanged, 2,907 have had their benefit reduced and 1,969 have had their benefit stopped.

District Offices (DOs) administer Incapacity Benefit (IB) along with a range of other benefits. The current live load of IB cases at Bolton DO is 13,156. In addition to this there are 5,199 credit only cases, where the customer receives National Insurance Credits but no IB.

I hope that this is helpful.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Criminal Court

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that the international criminal court is independent of Governments. [39239]

Mr. Fatchett: It is our policy that the International Criminal Court should conduct its business without interference by states. States parties to the treaty establishing the Court will however be given certain powers, such as the role of electing the judges and the power to refer situations to the Prosecutor for investigation. They will also have an obligation to co-operate in assisting the Court in such matters as the provision of evidence and the transfer of suspects. We also support proposals to give the Security Council a limited role, consistent with its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the establishment of an international criminal court. [39238]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received many representations, from MPs, NGOs and others, about the establishment of the International Criminal Court.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with fellow members of the United Nations Security Council regarding the creation of an international criminal court. [39241]

Mr. Fatchett: Officials in the FCO and in other departments with an interest in the International Criminal Court have had contacts with their counterparts in many other countries, both those which are members of the Security Council and those which are not, on this subject.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy that the proposed international criminal court should have the authority to indict individuals without the threat of a national veto. [39237]

Mr. Fatchett: It is our policy that States Parties to the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court should not have a right of national veto over a prosecution. We are still considering in what circumstances a state with a direct interest in a case but which is not party to the treaty establishing the Court should have to give its consent before a prosecution can take place.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* the European Union concerning the proposed international criminal court. [39240]

Mr. Fatchett: Officials from the FCO and other departments with an interest in the International Criminal Court keep in close touch with their counterparts in the Government of the United States of America. There has been EU co-ordination at the meetings of the Preparatory Committee on the Court, and the FCO hosted a two-day meeting of EU experts on the Court in February. During the remainder of our Presidency of the EU we shall continue to co-ordinate the views of EU partners on the Court, so far as it is possible to do so.

Electro-shock Weapons

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) of 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *65–66*, what action has been taken to encourage EU member states to ban the export of electro-shock weapons, with particular reference to batons. [39266]

Mr. Fatchett: We have had discussions with EU partners, including gathering information on their own controls in this area. We will continue to work to fulfil the commitment given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to monitor whether British companies are manufacturing electro-shock equipment in other countries to export them to third countries. [39228]

Mr. Fatchett: There is no monitoring mechanism at present. We have no information that British companies are manufacturing electro-shock equipment in other countries to export them to third countries. If we were to obtain information that this was happening, we would investigate fully.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department established the voluntary vetting scheme to prevent the transfer of technology related to weapons of mass destruction in the higher education sector; and if his Department compiles an annual report on the operation of this scheme. [38964]

Mr. Fatchett: The Voluntary Vetting Scheme was announced in Parliament through a Written Parliamentary Question on 19 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *137*, and took effect in October 1994.

This Department does not compile an annual report on the operation of the scheme.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent actions the Government have taken to improve the security of nuclear materials in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. [39495]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the House today to the Private Notice Question asked by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan).

Consumer Training

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to paragraph 7.2(3) of COM (97) 684, what is his Department's policy towards the funding of the promotion of the education and training of consumers in schools. [37001]

Ms Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

Consumer education is not a discrete subject of the National Curriculum. However, education about consumer issues is covered by the National Curriculum which all maintained schools are required to deliver to all pupils aged 5 to 16. There is scope for addressing consumer issues within most of the subjects of the National Curriculum. However, most relevant issues will normally be covered by National Curriculum design and technology, which covers much of traditional Home Economics, as well as, in particular, geography and mathematics. There would also be scope for covering the area in a schools programme of personal, social and health education.

It is not the Government's policy to legislate on what form of education or training people must follow after leaving compulsory schooling. There are nonetheless ample opportunities for people to pursue such education or training post-16.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what specific changes to departmental transport arrangements have to date been implemented following the receipt of the Green Transport Plan; [36640]

(2) what date she plans to introduce a green commuting plan. [36659]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 27 March 1998]:* The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions circulated to all Departments in September last year a "Guide to Green Transport Plans". My Department is considering how to respond to its recommendations.

Seagate Technology

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the religious composition of *(a)* the work force in the Seagate Technology factories in Limavady and Londonderry and *(b)* residents in the travel-to-work area in which each Seagate Technology factory is located. [38199]

Mr. Ingram: *(a)* The composition of the workforce in the Seagate Technology factories in Limavady and Londonderry in October 1997 was:

	Composition
Protestant	360 (25.5%)
Roman Catholic	1,051 (74.5%)
Non-Determined	37
Total	1,448

(b) Seagate's Londonderry plant is located within the Derry City Council area. While the majority of workers are drawn from the Council areas in which the plants are located, both plants also draw some workers from a wider area.

According to the 1991 population Census the Protestant and Roman Catholic proportions of the economically active and unemployed populations in these Council areas were as follows:

Percentage

		Protestant	*Roman Catholic*
Derry	Economically Active	28.2	71.8
	Unemployed	16.6	83.4
Limavady	Economically Active	47.1	52.9
	Unemployed	32.1	67.9

Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the costs of *(a)* anti-drugs education initiatives and *(b)* other drugs reduction initiatives in each of the past 14 years; and what is the expected cost of similar campaigns in each of the next five years. [38357]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 April 1998]:* It is not possible to provide information on expenditure on anti-drugs education and other drug reduction initiatives in each of the last 14 years. This information is aggregated with other activities, in particular alcohol and tobacco, but also personal health issues.

A three year campaign aimed at addressing drug issues will come to an end in March 1999. £500,000 was made directly available each year to support that campaign.

The strategy for tackling drugs in Northern Ireland will be reviewed over the next few months and decisions about future expenditure will be made following the completion of that review.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much her Department has spent on developing vaccines to prevent bovine tuberculosis since 1985; and how much investment is planned for each of the next five years. [38049]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No expenditure has been incurred on developing vaccines to prevent bovine tuberculosis. No investment is planned.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many badgers were trapped under the tuberculosis control scheme in each year since 1985 by *(a)* snares and *(b)* cage traps; and if she will indicate the number of animals which suffered injuries in *(a)* and *(b)*. [38052]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost of the proposed badger culling experiment broken down to show each constituent element for *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* each subsequent year of the proposed experiment. [38050]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Nil. Northern Ireland is not involved in the proposed badger culling experiment.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what records are maintained of the number of non-target species caught in snares set for badgers under the tuberculosis control scheme. [38051]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Lawyers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will take steps to increase public awareness of *(a)* the UN Draft Principles on the Role of Lawyers approved by the 8th UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders and *(b)* paragraph 5.13 of the Concluding Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Human Dimension of the CSCE agreed in June 1990. [38907]

Mr. Ingram: UK law fully respects and takes into account UN Basic Principles such as those mentioned in the question. The United Kingdom is also participating in discussions in the Council of Europe concerning freedom to exercise the profession of lawyer. These discussions cover, amongst other things, the right of access to lawyers, freedom from harassment and the need for lawyers to act in accordance with professional standards.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will instigate an independent investigation into the extent of threats to legal counsel in Northern Ireland; and what protection is made available to solicitors and barristers who are threatened in connection with their professional duties. [38909]

Mr. Ingram: If threats are made to legal counsel they should be reported to the RUC for investigation. There are no proposals to have an independent inquiry. The duty that the police have to protect people and property is available to solicitors and barristers, and is the same as to all citizens in the United Kingdom.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will request the RUC, Law Society and Bar Council to organise joint training seminars for police officers on the role of defence lawyers in the administration of justice. [38910]

Mr. Ingram: The Chief Constable has been in contact with the Law Society seeking their involvement in RUC detective training courses.

Holding Centres

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the date on which video and audio-recording equipment will be installed and fully operational in each of the holding centres. [38911]

Mr. Ingram: Silent video recording of police interviews with terrorist suspects became fully operational from midnight on 10 March 1998 in Castlereagh Holding Centre; and work is at an advanced stage to install equipment in Gough Barracks and RUC Strand Road, Londonderry. Provision to enable audio recording of such interviews has been included in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1998, which received Royal Assent on 8 April. Audio recording will begin after the necessary draft Code of Practice has been drawn up and approved by both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will consult with the Chief Constable and Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres in order to draw up RUC Guidelines regulating what officers may say to suspects in the course of interrogation about their legal advisers. [38908]

Mr. Ingram: Only the highest standards of police behaviour are acceptable in all contacts with detained persons. The complaints procedure is well publicised and where a complaint is lodged it will be investigated fully.

Guidelines on access to legal advice in the Holding Centres are set out in the statutory Code of Practice for the Detention, Treatment and Questioning of Persons Detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, a copy of which is obtainable from the Library of the House.

Patrick Finucane

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will appoint an independent judicial inquiry to investigate the case of Patrick Finucane. [38912]

Mr. Ingram: The murder of Patrick Finucane is the subject of an ongoing RUC inquiry. Three people have already been charged and convicted with possession of the weapon used to kill Mr. Finucane.

Legal Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will repeal the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to reinstate the right to silence; and what steps she takes to ensure that the standard for admitting confession evidence conforms to the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order of 1989. [38913]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to amend the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. The Order does not end a defendant's right to remain silent. Rather, it enables a court to draw whatever inferences appear proper when a defendant remains silent in circumstances which clearly call for an explanation.

On the latter point, while the law provides for a lower standard of proof for the admissibility of confession evidence in terrorist cases, that provision is currently

under review. In practice, judges apply the higher Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) standard. Within this framework, the admissibility of confession evidence is subject to judicial discretion.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to reinstate the right to trial by jury. [38914]

Mr. Ingram: While the Government wish to reinstate jury trial for all offences as soon as circumstances allow, they cannot do so while a serious risk remains of the criminal justice system being undermined, or of defendants not being guaranteed a fair trial. The Government have no current plans to change the mode of trial for terrorist cases heard in the Northern Ireland courts.

DEFENCE

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on hospitality since 1 May 1997. [27765]

Mr. Spellar: The figure for total expenditure on hospitality incurred by my Department from 1 May 1997 to the end of February 1998 is £4.230M.

This figure reflects expenditure by my Department, the establishments and formations of the Armed Forces at home and abroad and non-Trading Fund Agencies. The figures for Trading Fund Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies are not held centrally, but are kept separately by these organisations.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make statement on the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle Programme. [38101]

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle Programme. [39613]

Mr. George Robertson: I am pleased to announce that, together with Germany and France, we intend to develop and produce a family of armoured utility vehicles to meet the requirements of all three nations. The UK needs these vehicles to replace FV430, Saxon and Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) utility vehicles. We plan to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the joint programme, known in the UK as the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle, MRAV, covering development and initial production of a total of 600 vehicles. Subject to the completion of the national approvals processes in Germany and France and the negotiation of satisfactory contract terms and conditions, it is intended to place a contract with Eurokonsortium, a consortium including GKN Defence Ltd. from the UK, Krauss-Maffei/ Wegmann and Mak. from Germany, and GIAT from France.

This programme will be managed within the quadrilateral Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation, known as OCCAR, and represents a major collaboration with our European allies. Collaboration will bring a number of benefits including improved interoperability and financial savings, through sharing of development costs and economies of scale in production. The project also offers UK industry the opportunity to strengthen its links with the leading companies in the European armoured vehicles industry.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gulf War veterans have been examined by the Medical Assessment Programme in connection with Gulf War Syndrome; and if he will give a breakdown of the illnesses identified by this programme. [38604]

Dr. Reid: There is no medical or scientific consensus about the nature of the illnesses being suffered by some Gulf veterans or whether there is any commonality between them. The Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) was established by my Department in 1993 with the aim of providing veterans who are concerned about their health following service in the Gulf conflict with a clinical diagnosis of their medical conditions. As at 2 April 1998, 2,285 patients had attended at least one consultation at the Programme and a further 132 had been given appointments and were waiting to be seen. The vast majority of those who have attended the MAP are Gulf veterans themselves. However, where medically appropriate, veterans' partners are also welcome to attend and a small number have done so. In addition, some civilians for whom MOD was responsible during the Gulf conflict have also been seen by the MAP.

A paper analysing the clinical diagnoses of the first 1,000 patients seen by the MAP is close to completion and will shortly be submitted to an external journal for peer review; if accepted, the date of subsequent publication would be a matter for that journal.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work is being carried out by his Department to analyse the chemical warfare mental incapacitant Agent 15; where this work is being conducted; and what is the scientific name of Agent 15. [38606]

Dr. Reid: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 9 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns 3–6, that the Ministry of Defence was considering how best to investigate Agent 15 further. This process continues; we are currently reviewing all available information on this agent and related compounds, with the assistance of CBD Porton Down. No laboratory work is being carried out at present. I expect to make an announcement when this process is complete.

Agent 15 is one of a large group of chemicals known as glycollates (esters of glycollic acid). Its scientific name remains classified for non-proliferation reasons, because it reveals details of the agent's chemical structure and would thus be of value to a country which wished to produce it.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the service career

in the Royal Irish Regiment of *(a)* David Keys, *(b)* Stephen McClean, *(c)* Noel McCready and *(d)* Ryan Robley; on what date each joined the Regiment; and what were the circumstances of their discharge. [38904]

Dr. Reid: My Department has no record of David Keys having served with the Ulster Defence Regiment or the Royal Irish Regiment.

Ex Private Stephen McClean was enlisted into the Ulster Defence Regiment (part time) on 17 July 1988. He was subsequently enlisted into the full-time element of the Regiment on 1 January 1989. The Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Rangers were then amalgamated in 1992 to form the Royal Irish Regiment. Stephen McClean was discharged on 22 September 1993 under the authority of the Ulster Defence Regiment Regulation Paragraph 5.075 (which were still extant) as his services were no longer required.

Ex Private Noel McCready was enlisted into the Ulster Defence Regiment (part time) on 11 January 1989 and then into the full-time element on 1 February 1989. He was discharged on 9 April 1990 under the Ulster Defence Regiment Regulations Paragraph 5.082.

Ex Private Ryan Robley joined the Ulster Defence Regiment (part time) on 15 October 1987, transferring to the full-time element on 6 March 1988. He was discharged from the Royal Irish Regiment on 14 July 1994 on completion of his engagement (Ulster Defence Regiment Regulations Paragraph 5.070).

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 22 April. [38039]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. I will have further such meetings later today.

WALES

National Assembly

8. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the concordats between the national assembly and UK Government Departments. [38006]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have received a number of representations about concordats since the White Paper was published.

Concordats are intended to preserve the good working relationships that exist between my Department and Whitehall so that the work of the Assembly will be conducted effectively. My officials are currently discussing concordats with other departments and as I have told the House previously, the drafts will be published when they are ready although I do not expect them to be available until after the Government of Wales Bill has completed its passage through Parliament.

21. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the site of the National Assembly for Wales from people in north Wales. [38022]

Mr. Ron Davies: On 3 February, in response to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), I placed in the Library of the House a list of all those who responded during the public consultation exercise.

Child Care

9. **Ms Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce a child care strategy in Wales. [38007]

Mr. Win Griffiths: We hope to publish a strategy soon.

Council Tax

10. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on council tax discounts in Wales. [38008]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Local authorities estimate that 34 per cent. of persons liable for council tax will qualify for discounts in 1998-99.

New Deal

11. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the new deal in Wales. [38009]

Mr. Hain: Excellent progress is being made in implementing the New Deal for young people in the South-West Wales Pathfinder area. Three hundred and fifty employers have signed New Deal agreements, pledging over 1,500 jobs.

17. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new jobs he plans to fund under the new deal in Wales. [38016]

Mr. Hain: Funding for the New Deal in Wales is provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Of those entering a New Deal option, 45 per cent. are expected to go into a subsidised job. As the programme is demand led, no numerical targets have been set.

European Regional Funds

12. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the future of European regional funds for Wales. [38010]

Mr. Hain: We have received many representations, both from hon. Members and from representatives of the wider partnership.

Minimum Wage

13. **Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Welsh businesses regarding a minimum wage. [38011]

Mr. Hain: Since 1 May last year, the Welsh Office has received 14 representations on the National Minimum Wage. Of these, one was from an individual business, 7 were from umbrella organisations and the remainder were from members of the public.

Public Transport

14. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the allocation of extra resources to public transport. [38013]

Mr. Hain: Later in the spring the Government will publish a UK Transport White Paper, together with a complementary transport policy statement for Wales. These documents will set out our integrated transport policy as well as how we intend to ensure that public expenditure on transport is directed towards meeting our policy objectives, including the promotion of public transport.

Inward Investment

15. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of inward investment attracted to Wales since 1 May 1997. [38014]

Mr. Ron Davies: From 1 May 1997 to 31 March 1998 the Welsh Development Agency has recorded 114 inward investment projects forecasting 12,114 new and safeguarded jobs and capital investment of over £632 million. I am confident that Wales will maintain its excellent record of inward investment.

NHS Trusts (Gwent)

16. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on NHS trust reconfiguration in Gwent. [38015]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I announced on 30 March that my right hon. Friend and I wish to consult on the creation of a new single NHS Trust in Gwent. Consultation on this, and our other proposals for the reconfiguration of NHS trusts in Wales, will take place over the summer.

Manufacturing Industry

18. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the prospects for manufacturing industry output in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38019]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh office has made no such assessment.

Common Agricultural Policy

19. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on reform of the common agricultural policy and its impact on Wales. [38020]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The European Commission has now published its proposals and the Government have given them a broad welcome. I attended the Agriculture Council meeting on 31 March at which the proposals were discussed. These discussions will continue and we will continue to work closely with farming unions in Wales to identify and argue for the needs of Welsh agriculture as the process goes forward.

Gwent Tertiary College

20. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the composition and record of the corporation of Gwent tertiary college. [38021]

Mr. Hain: Gwent Tertiary College Further Education Corporation comprises:

Mr. Chris Hughes: Chairman of Governors
Mr. Brian Bird: Vice Chairman, Independent member
Mr. Anthony Atherton: Independent member
Mr. Philip Curzon: Independent member
Mr. John Davidson: Independent member
Mr. Tudor Griffiths: Independent member
Mr. David Mason: Principal
Mr. David Jones: Independent member
Cllr. Mrs. Anita Lloyd: Co-opted member
Mr. Tom Mulcahy: Independent member
Ms Heulwen Pritchard: Independent member
Mrs. Anne Ransome: Staff member
Mr. John Rogers: Staff member
Mrs. Kate Walker: Independent member
Mr. Shaun Walters: Independent member
Mr. Neville Waters: Independent member
Mr. Malcolm Cox: Student member.

24. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the number of inquiries currently being conducted into the running of Gwent tertiary college. [38026]

Mr. Hain: There are currently three external inquires underway at Gwent Tertiary College. These are being conducted by the National Audit Office, the Welsh Funding Councils' Audit Service, and the European Court of Auditors together with the Verification and Audit Section of the Department for Education and Employment. In addition, Ernst and Young, the College's internal auditors, are conducting an audit.

Homelessness

22. **Mr. Caton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the problem of street homelessness in Wales. [38023]

Mr. Win Griffiths: We are committed to ensuring that no-one needs to sleep rough in Wales. I will consider the information provided by local authorities in their Housing Strategy and Operational Plans for 1998–99 before deciding what more needs to be done to achieve this objective.

European Structural Funds

23. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the renegotiation of the European structural funds. [38024]

Mr. Hain: Since Welsh GDP per capita is extremely low by comparison with both the EU and GB average, the Government believe that Wales is entitled to secure the maximum benefit from the Structural Funds after 1999.

Local Authority Capping

26. **Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding Government proposals to lift local authority capping. [38028]

Mr. Win Griffiths: As part of the process of modernising local government, we are consulting on a range of issues to bring government back to the people of Wales. A consultation paper seeking views on options for strengthening local government finance and accountability will be published shortly. This will include options for how an end to crude and universal capping might be brought about.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the scope for revision of his proposals for the reconfiguration of the health trusts in Wales following the consultation process. [38027]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Final decisions on a new configuration of NHS trust in Wales will be taken only when all the responses to the public consultation exercise have been considered.

Sheepmeat Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for the Welsh sheepmeat industry. [39277]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Slaughtering of lambs to date in 1998 has been significantly higher than last year due to farmers holding lambs back which would normally have been sold earlier. Low producer returns were a major factor. The high volume and in many cases the poor quality of animals marketed have depressed prices paid to producers. The Government's recent decision to introduce private storage aid for the sheepmeat sector in the UK should help to bolster prices and improve short term returns to producers.

Latest agriculture census figures show an increase in the breeding ewe population in the UK. This is expected to lead to a 12 per cent. increase in lamb production in 1998. As a result, supplies of sheepmeat are forecast to increase by 4 per cent. in 1998 in the UK. This is likely to continue to put pressure on producer prices throughout the year. However, the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) expect a return to a more orderly supply in the Autumn; this should improve matters although prices are not expected to attain the levels of two years ago.

On a more positive note, the latest available MLC data indicate a 10 per cent. increase in household lamb purchases in February compared to last year.

The Welsh Office, through its funding of Welsh Food Promotions, will continue to ensure that efforts are maintained to promote and market Welsh lamb at home and abroad. Given the general over supply in the market and the strong pound, it will be important to emphasise the farm-assured quality and wholesome image of Welsh lamb in order to stimulate demand.

Dairy Imports

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of (i) milk and (ii) associated dairy products imported into *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [39276]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information for the UK in 1997 is given as follows. Separate figures for Wales are not available.

	Tonnes	*Value (£000)*
Milk Products		
Whole milk	63,305	19,365
Powdered milk	23,635	38,516
Skimmed milk	90,221	27,714
Buttermilk	13,928	13,883
Condensed milk	13,190	11,672
Total	204,279	111,150
Dairy Products		
Butter	109,613	214,869
Cheese	231,925	571,623
Cream	11,304	13,962
Ice Cream	45,539	79,512
Whey	25,572	15,053
Yoghurt	70,996	62,559
Other	3,439	4,202
Total	498,388	961,780
Grand Total	702,666	1,072,930

The data for 1997 are provisional and subject to amendment. The above data include an estimate of below threshold trade, but exclude an estimate for non-response.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the dairy industry in Wales. [39274]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Although my right hon. Friend and I have received numerous representations regarding the problems in the beef and sheep sectors since January this year, some of which also mentioned milk prices, we have received only 10 written representations referring specifically to the dairy sector.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of non-farming jobs dependent upon the dairy industry in Wales. [39275]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Welsh Office does not make such estimates. However, the Welsh Institute of Rural Studies, Aberystwyth published a report on 20 April on "LFA Policy in Wales: A Review of the Socio-Economic and Environmental Effects of the HLCA Scheme" sponsored by the Welsh Office which provides such estimates. It states that using 1991 estimates for the milk production sector for every on farm job there are 0.25 jobs in other industries in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions he has discussed the dairy industry with leaders of the farming unions. [39272]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I and my right hon. Friend have met representatives of the farming unions regularly to discuss matters of common interest, including the dairy industry, and will continue to do so.

National Orchestra of Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what ways and by what amounts he has assisted the National Orchestra of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39429]

Mr. Ron Davies: Welsh Office support for the arts is channelled through the Arts Council of Wales. In 1998–99 the Arts Council's grant to the BBC National Orchestra of Wales is £609,875.

National Lottery (Cricket Clubs)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Sports Lottery Distribution Board concerning applications by local cricket clubs; and if he will make a statement. [39432]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have had no such discussions with SPORTLOT—the Lottery Sports Fund for Wales administered by the Sports Council for Wales. The Sports Council considers applications from a wide range of sports and decisions on those applications are taken entirely independently of Government.

Since it began distributing Lottery funds in 1995, the Sports Council has awarded £1.8 million to 38 local cricket schemes throughout Wales.

Health and Social Services Expenditure

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the increase in expenditure on *(a)* health and *(b)* social services between 1996–97 and 1998–99. [38025]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Central Government's own expenditure and the hypothecated resources made available to local authorities for expenditure on health and personal social services in 1996–97 was £2,307,381,000. Planned provision in 1998–99 is £2,486,838,000. About 99% of this expenditure relates to provision for the National Health Service.

The bulk of social services expenditure by local authorities is financed by resources from the Department, which are not hypothecated to specific services, and revenue raised locally. Local authorities have not yet supplied details of their planned expenditure on services for 1998–99.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what support is available to mature students on access courses to higher education; and what plans he has to alter the current arrangements. [39148]

Dr. Howells: All mature students can apply to their LEAs for discretionary awards and to their colleges for financial support. Some students may receive additional help through fee remission and free child care.

The current system of post-16 LEA discretionary awards fails many students. We have therefore introduced legislation to abolish them and have asked an advisory group chaired by Graham Lane to develop recommendations for fairer, more effective replacement arrangements. We plan to consult on the Group's recommendations in May.

Sir Geoffrey JohnsonSmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide comparative calculations of the expected debt on graduation of a student entering an undergraduate course in the autumn of 1999 under *(a)* the Government's proposals and *(b)* the Dearing Committee's proposals, assuming receipt of a full maintenance grant. [38737]

Dr. Howells: The maximum amount that a student can borrow will depend on the length of the course and the place of study, as well as the student's and his or her parents' or spouse's income. Under the Government's proposals, a student completing a three year course outside London which began in 1999 and who took out the full loan available each year might expect to have borrowed a total of £10,165 in 1998 prices. The comparable figure under the Dearing Committee's proposals would be £8,083.

Repayments under our proposed system will be made only when a graduate's income exceeds £10,000 a year and the level of repayments will then be linked directly to the individual's income above that amount. A graduate with an income of £17,000 per annum, for example, would make weekly repayments of about £12 a week.

Students and their families will be expected to contribute no more up front to the costs of their higher education under our proposals than they would under the current arrangements. Our proposals will ensure that students have access to the funds which they need while they are studying while generating substantial additional resources for investment in higher and further education.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the cost of exempting all students who have been accepted to Scottish universities from England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the fourth year of their tuition fees. [39200]

Dr. Howells: We estimate that the cost of exempting students from England from contributing towards the fourth year of their tuition fees for first degree courses at Scottish universities would be some £1.5 million per annum.

The cost of exempting students from Wales and Northern Ireland is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will change the regulations which require that a person under the age of 25 be married at least two years before he or she can be deemed independent of his or her parents for grant or loan related purposes. [39018]

Dr. Howells: We have no plans to change this regulation for the academic year 1998/99. But we will be reviewing the means-testing arrangements for 1999/2000.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to allow mature students attending higher education institutions on undergraduate courses to access *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans in 1998 and 1999. [39023]

Dr. Howells: Students entering full-time undergraduate courses in 1998/99 will have access to maintenance grants for one year only at a reduced rate, regardless of their age. Increased loans will also be available to students aged under 50 at the start of their courses.

While we have no plans to extend the eligibility for loans to those aged 50 and over for 1998/99, we intend to review the eligibility requirements for 1999/2000 and subsequent years when grants will no longer be available. The recent consultation paper on lifelong learning, "The Learning Age," invited views on extending loans to those in their early 50s who wish to enter higher education, for example, to retrain following redundancy. Final decisions will be taken in the light of the responses to that consultation.

Under the new arrangements all students, irrespective of their age, will be eligible to receive means-related help towards their contribution to tuition costs.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to allow mature students attending higher education courses who are in receipt of income support to retain their full benefit entitlement and access the full income contingent loan. [39024]

Dr. Howells: The Government have no plans to change the way student loans are treated in assessing eligibility for benefits. The student loan is a normal means of funding students and although repayable, it is still real income intended to support students in higher education. It would be wrong to treat students who do have access to benefits more favourably than others by ignoring the availability of this source of income. Mature students aged 50 or over at the start of their course are currently ineligible for loans and therefore no account is taken of this form of income when assessing their entitlement to benefit.

Autism

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from parents of autistic children relating to the provision of special education; and what response he has made. [38925]

Ms Estelle Morris: It is for schools and local education authorities to arrange suitable special educational provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders, whether in specialist autism schools, other special schools, autism units at mainstream schools or in mainstream classes with support. The Department receives representations from parents about individual cases and from autism organisations about autism provision in general. There was broad support for the proposal in the special educational needs Green Paper for regional planning to develop specialist provision and research to establish best practice. In the light of a review commissioned by the Department and work to be undertaken for the Local Government Association, we will consider what further guidance to offer on how best to meet the needs of children with a broad range of autistic disorders.

Universities and Colleges

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information his Department collates on the resources of United Kingdom universities and colleges. [38879]

Dr. Howells: The Department does not itself collate any information on the resources of universities and colleges. However the Higher Education Funding Council for England collates information on the resources and financial health of universities and colleges in England from copies of their annual audited financial statements and from other returns which are provided to it on a strictly confidential basis. The Council publishes summary information for the sector as a whole periodically.

Information on institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Literacy Strategy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if officials from his Department were involved in drafting the literacy strategy document recently circulated to schools. [39152]

Mr. Byers: Yes. Officials drafted the document, taking advice from various sources, including Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Teacher Training Agency.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 227, on the Literacy Task Force, when it published the results of its study on the literacy strategy; and if it is currently providing advice to his Department. [39203]

Mr. Byers: The Literacy Task Force met for the last time in July 1997, and published its final report in August 1997.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the combined budgets for TECs in England for 1998–99. [39003]

Dr. Howells: The total DfEE TEC budget provision for 1998–99 is £1,304 million.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the 1998–99 budget for each TEC in the North West in the geographical area within which the North West Regional Development Agency will operate; and what is the total of these budgets. [39004]

Dr. Howells: Information relating to individual TEC budgets will not be available until contract negotiations between TECs and their providers have been completed. This is expected to be around October.

The total 1998–99 budgets for the TECs in the geographical area within which North West Regional Development agency will operate is £219,492,210.

Access Courses

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to allow mature students on access courses in colleges of further education to continue to receive jobseeker's allowance whilst attending access courses. [39027]

Mr. Alan Howarth: For those aged 18–24, unemployed 6 months or more, there is an option under the New Deal to study full-time for up to 12 months. Study may be on access courses. These people will receive an allowance rather than Jobseeker's Allowance.

For those aged 25 and over, unemployed 2 years or more, there will be an opportunity to study full-time for up to a year on the New Deal while remaining on Jobseeker's Allowance. Study may be on access courses.

For those receiving Jobseeker's Allowance who do not fall into the above New Deal groups or for those in scope of the 25 and over New Deal who do not wish to take up full-time study, the existing Jobseeker's Allowance legislation will continue to apply. The Jobseeker's Allowance rules allow study part-time while receiving Jobseeker's Allowance.

We will review the Jobseeker's Allowance rules on education and training in the light of experience of the Jobseeker's Allowance Workskill pilots and early experience of our welfare to work programme.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for each of the years 1988–89 to 1998–99, what has been the overall percentage annual increase in standard teachers' pay after the staging of awards has been taken into consideration. [39025]

Mr. Byers: Teachers' pay settlements have been as follows:

Year	*Percentage increase*
1988–89	4.75
1989–90	7.5
1990–91	9.3
1991–92	11.3
1992–93	7.8
1993–94	1.5
1994–95	2.9
1995–96	2.7
1996–97	3.75
1997–98	3.3
1998–99	3.8

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for each of the years 1988–89 to 1998–99, what has been the overall annual percentage increase in the teachers' pension award. [39026]

Dr. Howells: Public service pensions are increased under the annual Pensions Increase Orders. The annual percentage increases are given in the following table:

Effective date	*Percentage increase*
11 April 1988	4.2
10 April 1989	5.9
9 April 1990	7.6
8 April 1991	10.9
6 April 1992	4.1
12 April 1993	3.6
11 April 1994	1.8
10 April 1995	2.2
8 April 1996	3.9
7 April 1997	2.1
6 April 1998	3.6

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will meet the proposals for additional funding of higher education proposed by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education for each of the years 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [39147]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh) on 24 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *200.*

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will introduce measures to prevent further and higher education institutions that receive the majority of their income from public funds from unilaterally downgrading staff to reduce budgets; [39019]

(2) what plans he has to introduce measures to prevent the use of waiver clauses which remove the rights of employees to redundancy or unfair dismissal claims, in the contracts of academic staff at publicly funded FE and HE institutions. [39020]

Dr. Howells: Further and Higher Education Institutions are independent bodies. It is therefore for each institution to take decisions on internal organisation and management including the grading of staff and the form of their contracts. We do, however, expect institutions to work in partnership with their employees: as my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has made clear in *"The Learning Age"*, a confrontational management style is not acceptable in publicly funded bodies.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Broiler Chickens

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage a reduction in the incidence of leg problems in broiler chickens; and if he will make a statement. [37775]

Mr. Morley: Improving the leg health of broiler chickens is an important aim of the MAFF funded animal welfare research programme. Results have already demonstrated the beneficial effects of certain feeding and lighting programmes and these are now being promoted

to the industry. Good litter management is also important to leg health and is the subject of an ongoing advisory campaign carried out by ADAS on our behalf.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will request the European Commission to instruct its Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare to prepare a report on the welfare of intensively-kept broiler chickens; and if he will make a statement. [37773]

Mr. Morley: I understand the EU Commission has already put action in hand. We will be following developments with interest.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to bring to an end the use of catching practices which cause injuries and stress to broiler chickens; and if he will make a statement. [37776]

Mr. Morley: The current welfare code for domestic fowl reminds farmers of the need to take care to avoid injuring birds or causing them to panic during handling and catching. Failure to observe these and other provisions of this code may be used as evidence in proceedings under Section 1 of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 which makes it an offence to cause or allow livestock on agricultural land to suffer unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will implement the recommendation made by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1992 on the treatment of broiler chickens with physical conditions which limit their ability to reach food or water; and if he will make a statement. [37778]

Mr. Morley: Failure to take appropriate action to treat broiler chickens with physical conditions which limit their ability to reach food or water would give rise to offences under existing legislation which requires that livestock on agricultural land are protected from unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that broiler breeders are given sufficient food; and if he will make a statement. [37777]

Mr. Morley: The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 (Statutory Instrument 1994/2126) already require that all livestock (including poultry) are fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health and to satisfy their nutritional needs. The Farm Animal Welfare Council is currently reviewing all aspects of the welfare of broiler breeders including current feeding regimes and will report later this year. I shall examine their recommendations carefully before deciding whether further action needs to be taken.

Fisheries Restructuring

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what EU fisheries restructuring and modernisation funds will be available to the United Kingdom once agreed United Kingdom fleet reductions have been achieved. [37566]

Mr. Morley: EU funds for structural assistance in the fisheries sector are administered under Council Regulation EC No. 3699/93, which required Member States to submit Sectoral Plans setting out detailed programmes of aid taking account of the provisions of their Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes (MAGP) for improving the balance between catching capacity and available stocks. Regulation 3699/93 does not, however, allow the granting of any aid for vessel construction which does not comply with a Member State's global, intermediate MAGP objectives and its final objectives by segment within the stated time limits. Aid for any modernisation likely to result in an increase in fishing effort is similarly precluded.

Because of the extent of the fleet reductions required to meet UK MAGP III targets, the Sectoral Plan submitted by the previous administration in March 1994, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, gave priority to expenditure on decommissioning and vessel safety grants. Some £14.8 million remains under these headings in the current programming period, which ends on 31 December 1999, subject to the required nationally funded contributions being available to draw down these EU funds. But the previous administration made no provision for UK expenditure to comply with MAGP targets after the end of the 1997–98 financial year.

The question of what EU aid might be available for other restructuring and modernisation measures once fleet reduction targets have been achieved accordingly depends both on any necessary further expenditure towards meeting those targets and on new resources being found in UK national spending plans, which are still in the process of being examined in the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. Entitlement to such aid would not, however, be automatic, but would require revisions to the UK's Sectoral Plan which the Government would propose only if they considered such measures justified in the circumstances then prevailing.

Farmers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his timescale for the introduction of an early retirement scheme for farmers; [37954]

(2) what plans he has to link the proposed early retirement scheme for farmers with measures to assist young people to enter the industry. [37953]

Mr. Morley: Responses to the consultation document issued on the principle of whether or not to introduce an early retirement scheme or other measures have been requested by 30 April. If the Government decide, in the light of these responses, to introduce such a scheme prior approval must be sought from the European Commission. The Commission could take up to six months to grant such approval. Any scheme is therefore unlikely to be introduced before the end of 1998.

The Government will consider carefully any representations that an early retirement scheme should be linked to measures to assist young people to enter farming.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Townend: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what ruling the European Court of Justice has made concerning the Order of the President of the European Court of Justice, Case 246/89R-Commission v. the United Kingdom, Paragraph 26, at page 3132. [38193]

Mr. Morley: The European Court of Justice confirmed in case C 246/89 that the UK had complied with the President's interim order (Case C 246/89R) to suspend the application of the nationality requirements enshrined in the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 with effect from 2 November 1989. The Court made no specific reference to paragraph 26 of the President's order.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will reply to the letters written by Prowse Thomas (Solicitors), of Brixham, on behalf of trawler owners Captain P. D. and Mrs. J. W. McLeod, to his Department on the 5, 17 and 22 December 1997, 9 and 17 January 1998, and 13 and 23 February 1998; what the reasons are for the delay; and for what reasons he has refused to grant dispensation, relating to the trawler Van Dijck. [38384]

Mr. Morley: I understand that Ministry officials have been in correspondence with Prowse Thomas and that the matter has now been concluded.

Live Animal Exports

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of arrangements for enforcing the rules on the welfare of animals exported live to the Continent to be completed. [38801]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *116–17*. Our detailed proposals will be issued shortly for public consultation.

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of salmon and freshwater fisheries to be completed. [38789]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *234–35*.

Fishing Vessel Licensing

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review of fishing vessel licensing to be completed. [38802]

Mr. Morley: The review of fishing vessel licensing has yet to commence but I would expect the review to be completed by the end of 1998.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reason the EU questionnaire on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy was not addressed to member states' Governments. [39261]

Mr. Morley: The questionnaire was issued by the European Commission. Determining the addressees was a matter for the Commission.

Harwich Harbour

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the dumping at sea off the Essex coast of material dredged from Harwich harbour; [38943]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effects of the dumping at sea of material from the dredging of Harwich harbour on *(a)* the marine environment, *(b)* coastal fisheries and *(c)* lobster fisheries off the coast of Essex. [38944]

Mr. Morley: A site known as Rough Towers, some 15 kilometres south-east of Harwich, has been used for disposal of dredgings from a number of ports including Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich for many years.

Monitoring at this disposal site has been, and will continue to be, carried out by the Ministry's scientists at the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science as well as by Harwich Haven Authority. Inevitably, disposal of large quantities of dredgings has had a localised effect at the site itself but there is also some evidence that fine sediments from the disposal of maintenance material have dispersed from the site. Fishermen have expressed concern that the deposit of fine sediment has altered adjacent crustacea fishing grounds.

Harwich Haven Authority has applied for licences under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to dispose of dredged material arising from the deepening of the approach channel serving the Ports of Felixstowe and Harwich. A detailed assessment is currently being made of the applications and of the accompanying Environmental Statement, paying particular regard to the potential impact upon the marine environment and crustacea fisheries. Harwich Haven Authority, in consultation with the Ministry, are investigating a possible new disposal site further offshore to accommodate silty maintenance dredgings.

The Ministry requires particular emphasis to be given to the search for alternatives to sea disposal for dredged material. In conjunction with the Environment Agency, English Nature and local authorities, several areas have been identified where the material may be used beneficially to enhance marine and inter-tidal habitats and for coastal defence works, thus minimising the quantity to be disposed of to sea.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Luxembourg on 20 to 21 April; and if he will make a statement. [39558]

Dr. John Cunningham: I chaired the fifth meeting under the United Kingdom Presidency of the European Union Council of Agriculture Ministers on 20–21 April in Luxembourg. My noble Friend, Lord Donoughue, The Parliamentary Secretary responsible for the farming and food industry, represented the United Kingdom.

The principal items for discussion at the Council were Commission proposals on amendments to the EU banana, tobacco and olive oil market regimes; and its proposals in respect of common agricultural policy (CAP) prices for the 1998–99 marketing year. The Council marked an important step forward in the negotiations on all of these. On bananas, I was able to conclude that the Council would work towards an agreement in June on the basis of the Commission's proposal for changes to the EU banana regime to bring it into line with the ruling of the WTO appellate body. I was also able to conclude, in relation to both tobacco and olive oil, that intensive work would continue at expert level in the light of the guidance given by the Council, with the aim of reaching early conclusions on these proposals if possible. The Council also recognised the importance of concluding the CAP price-fixing negotiation under the UK Presidency in June, and I undertook as Council Chairman to work to achieve that outcome.

The Council adopted by qualified majority (Germany opposing) a proposal from the Commission extending until 31 December 1998 temporary rules on agri-monetary compensation and the freezing of green rates, but with tighter rules to reduce the risk of over-compensation.

At the request of the Dutch Agriculture Minister, I held a debate on a Dutch memorandum on the use of marker vaccines in combating classical swine fever. A number of delegations expressed support for Dutch proposals, whilst others expressed some reservations. All were mindful of the need to examine this issue against the background of what would be acceptable to the EU's international trading partners. I concluded that the Commission should continue its scientific work on this issue as a matter of urgency.

The Council held a short discussion, at the request of the French Minister, on proposed EU free trade agreements with Chile and the Mercosur countries. I undertook as Chairman of the Agriculture Council to report the views of Agriculture Ministers to the General Affairs Council where these agreements are being negotiated.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 April 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Waste Disposal

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what volume of non-inert waste was disposed of by each local authority in the North West in each of the last three years; and what estimate he has made of the volumes to be disposed of in 1998–99. [38469]

Angela Eagle: The following figures represent Environment Agency site return data for all non-inert waste in tonnes disposed of to landfill within each waste disposal authority in the north west region over the last three years.

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*[1]1997–98*	*[2]1998–99*
Greater Manchester	927	1,247	n/a	1,100
Merseyside	850	846	n/a	725
Cheshire	2,576	2,684	n/a	1,800
Cumbria	645	780	n/a	800
Lancashire	1,976	1,731	n/a	1,850

[1] Available June 1998

[2] Estimates

The estimate has been made by the Environment Agency on the basis of a 2% growth in the number of households.

Traffic Noise (A13)

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to protect residents in the Canning Town area from increased noise pollution as a result of changes to the A13; [39262]

(2) how much money has been made available for noise insulation for homes in the Canning Town area to protect them from increased traffic flows; [39263]

(3) what are the projected increased noise levels in the Canning Town area as a result of the improvements to the A13; [39264]

(4) how many homes in the Canning Town area will benefit from noise insulation offered by the Highways Agency to protect them against traffic-induced noise. [39265]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick, dated 23 April 1998:

The Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson has asked me to reply to your recent questions about traffic noise levels arising from the A13 Ironbridge to Canning Town improvement as these are operational issues for the Highways Agency.

No financial limit has been set for providing traffic noise insulation to homes in the area. Offers of noise insulation will be made to all occupiers of dwellings that qualify in accordance with the Noise Insulation Regulations.

We have estimated that up to 650 dwellings will qualify and a list will be published in due course.

Noise levels immediately adjacent to the scheme have been calculated to increase by between 1 and 4 db(A) in 2011 as a result of increased traffic flows and speeds.

However, to mitigate the effects, we are planning to put barriers alongside the new carriageways. 2 metre high barriers, 700 metres long are proposed on the new bridges over the River Lea and the Canning Town Flyover, and a 3 metre high screen, 160 metres long will be provided on the new road adjacent to Portree Street, to protect properties there. The benefits of these barriers for individual properties would depend on the type of property and its location.

Contaminated Land

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress his Department has made in respect of the publication of technical guidance arising out of provisions of the Environment Act 1995 relating to contaminated land. [39354]

Angela Eagle: Various technical reports are being prepared which will be relevant in the operation of local authorities' planning and building regulation functions, as well as in their future operation of the regulatory regime for contaminated land under the Environment Act 1995. These reports cover issues including guideline values for the assessment of the potential threats to human health posed by contaminants and model procedures for the management of contaminated land, from identification of the problem through the selection of the remediation option to assurance that the problem has been successfully dealt with. The Department expects these reports to be ready for publication in the autumn.

Driving Standards Agency

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what targets he has set for the Driving Standards Agency. [39489]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The key targets for the Driving Standards Agency are set out in its Business Plan, which include management objectives, performance indicators and key tasks. Copies of the Business Plan have been placed in the Library. The key targets are as follows:

achieve an average annual return on capital employed (ROCE) on statutory activities of 6% of net assets over the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2002;

increase the weighted average of fees by no more than RPI in each of the three years during the period 1 April 1997 to 1 April 2000 and by no more than RPI minus 1% in each of the following two years;

achieve a national average waiting time for car practical tests not exceeding 6 weeks and make appointments available within 10 weeks at 99% of permanent test centres;

aim to keep 99.5% of all practical test appointments which are in place 2 days prior to the appointment date;

answer practical test booking office telephones so that:

4 and 5 calls will be answered on their first dialling attempt;

90% of calls will be answered by a human voice within 30 seconds after completion of handling by the automatic answering system; and

an average of no more than 4% of calls in the queue will be abandoned before being answered;

ensure 95% of theory test candidates obtain a test booking at their preferred test centre and test session within 2 weeks of their preferred date; and

ensure theory test booking office telephones are answered so that:

incoming lines will not be engaged for more than 30 minutes in any week; and 95% of calls received will be answered by a human voice within 10 seconds after completion of handling by the automatic answering system.

Fire Deaths

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many deaths were caused by fires in buildings in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996; [39294]

(2) how many building fire deaths were caused by toxic smoke and fume inhalation in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [39295]

Mr. George Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The readily available information is given in the table.

Fatal casualties from fires in buildings, by cause of death, 1995 and 1996
United Kingdom

Number[1]

Year	*Total*	*Burns*	*Overcome by gas or smoke*	*Burns and overcome by gas or smoke*	*Physical injuries*	*Shock only*	*Precautionary check up*	*Other specified*	*Unspecified*
All buildings									
1995	599	138	291	112	0	13	0	21	24
1996p[2]	629	149	315	98	4	1	1	10	51
Dwellings									
1995	553	119	276	105	0	11	0	20	22
1996p[2]	594	134	304	92	4	1	1	10	48

[1] Includes additional "late" call and heat and smoke damage incidents.
[2] The figures for 1996 are likely to be revised downwards closer to those for 1995 as later information becomes available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Broadcasting

Mrs. Dean: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the progressive lifting of the broadcast entertainment restrictions affecting BT and other public telecommunications operators; and if she will make a statement. [39839]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government have considered the options for fulfilling their commitment carefully, and I am today publishing our conclusions. A copy of the document setting out the Government's approach has been placed in the Library of the House. In summary, we have concluded that:

(i) Public Telecommunications Operators (PTOs) along with all other operators should immediately have the option to compete in the provision of broadcast entertainment to the 17% of UK homes currently outside cable franchise areas;

(ii) PTOs and others should be allowed to compete in the provision of broadcast services, if they so wish, throughout the whole country from 1 January 2001.

We are following through on our commitment. We need to remove the uncertainty, created by the previous Government, over when and how the restrictions they placed on BT and other PTOs might be lifted. It has become increasingly damaging for all operators—including cable. All operators need greater certainty and clarity about the regulatory position as they plan long-term investments for advanced digital services.

We want to restore confidence for all market players and enable the benefits of new technologies to be delivered throughout the country.

We want to encourage competition which will drive down prices, enhance innovation and encourage private sector investment—to the benefit of the consumer—in all areas of the market; in services and in networks. A competitive market in network provision will underpin sustainable competition in services for the long term.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Public Analyst Services

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the review of public analyst services in England and Wales. [39885]

Mr. Rooker: The Government undertook to initiate a review in response to a recommendation in Professor James' report on the Food Standards Agency. I have today announced the terms of reference of the review, which will be undertaken by an independent Review Team under the chairmanship of Mr. Alan Turner, OBE. Interested parties are invited to submit written evidence to the Review Team. I hope the review will be completed before the end of the year.

Fishing Limits

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many square miles of sea there are between *(a)* the baseline and the six mile limit where the six mile limit applies, *(b)* the baseline and the 12 mile limit where the 12 mile limit applies and *(c)* the baseline and the 200 mile limit or the median line where applicable. [38167]

Mr. Morley: Information is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only by means of a survey at disproportionate cost. The Hydrographic Unit of the Ministry of Defence has, however, supplied the following information. The approximate area of sea between the low water line and the 12 mile limit is 49,473 square nautical miles. From the low water line to the 200 mile limit covers an area of approximately 211,130 square nautical miles. Both figures include areas of water inside the baselines.

Fishery Restructuring

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate *(a)* the proportion of fishing fleet cutbacks required for United Kingdom receipt of EU restructuring funds for the industry which could be achieved through national repurchase of quota hopping vessels and licences and *(b)* the estimated cost of such repurchases. [37565]

Mr. Morley: A scheme aimed at compulsorily purchasing vessels and licence entitlements owned by non-UK interests would not be permissible under Community law. Nor would it be permissible to prevent any non-UK interests who have previously left the industry from re-investing in the UK fleet. Such a scheme could not therefore be used to help achieve the UK's outstanding fishing fleet reduction targets which, along with levels of non-UK ownership, vary considerably from segment to segment of the fleet. All UK registered fishing vessels have been eligible to apply for decommissioning, regardless of ownership.

Green-top Milk

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to make an announcement on the future sale of green-top milk in England. [39260]

Dr. John Cunningham: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *582*. We are still taking stock of all the points raised in the consultation and an announcement will be made in due course.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he has not yet replied to the letters from the Chief Executive of Devon County Council dated 16 December 1997 on the impact of the latest BSE measures and 9 March on the agricultural sector in Devon; and when he expects to reply to them. [36809]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 1 April 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I sent to the Chief Executive dated 8 April 1998, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Local Government

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to strengthen the ethical framework for local government. [39843]

Mr. Dewar: I believe the public must be able to rely on the highest standards of conduct from its elected representatives. I also believe that there must be provision for swift and authoritative investigation of complaints of misconduct against councillors. That is why I have today published a consultation paper on the proposed new ethical framework for local government which would provide for clearer standards of conduct for councillors and stronger means of investigating and punishing misconduct. I have placed copies in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Permanent Secretaries

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on the recruitment and appointment of permanent secretaries; in what circumstances open competition is used; and if he will make a statement. [37915]

The Prime Minister: Policy on the recruitment and appointment of permanent secretaries and on the use of open competition continues to be based on the checklist proposed in the Oughton Report on Career Management and Succession Planning published in November 1993 and endorsed by the last Government: namely

- is it necessary to fill the vacancy at all or at this level?
- if so, what is the nature of the job now and in the future?
- what qualifications, qualities, skills, experience and achievement record will a future job holder require?
- is there a sufficient field of candidates already within the department, or in order to get a strong field is it necessary to extend the search to the wider Civil Service or to full open competition?
- are there wider reasons in the departmental interest or the corporate interest of the Civil Service as a whole to provide the opportunity for new blood to be brought into the department or the Civil Service through this vacancy?

Ministerial Accommodation

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *19–20*, concerning ministerial accommodation, if he will list the Government ministers in official accommodation on *(a)* 1 April 1997 and *(b)* 1 April 1998. [38448]

The Prime Minister: The Ministers with official Government residences on 1 April 1997 were:

The Prime Minister
The Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
The Home Secretary
The Secretary of State for Defence
The Secretary of State for Scotland
The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

In addition, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and other Northern Ireland Ministers had the use of accommodation in Hillsborough Castle while on duty in Northern Ireland.

At 1 April 1998, the following Ministers were in official Government residences:

Myself

The Deputy Prime Minister

The Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

The Secretary of State for Defence

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment

The Secretary of State for Scotland

The President of the Board of Trade.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and other Northern Ireland Ministers also have the use of accommodation in Hillsborough Castle while on duty in Northern Ireland.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those who worked in No. 10 Downing Street, giving their job titles, on *(a)* 1 April 1998 and *(b)* 1 April 1997. [38474]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* Those working in No. 10 Downing Street on the dates referred to were as follows:

	1 April 1998	*1 April 1997*
Private Secretaries, appointments and honours staff	25	21
Policy Unit	16	9
Press Office	11	10
Strategic Communications Unit	8	—
Support staff (including administrative, secretarial, messengerial, custodial, switchboard staff and drivers)	85	82
Political Office	7	8

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 72, if he will identify the precise references in the Ministerial Code to partners and officials. [38571]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The Ministerial Code seeks to lay down general principles. The key principle governing Ministerial travel was set out in my answer to the right hon. Member on 3 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 72.

Security Vetting Appeals Panel

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the members of the Security Vetting Appeals Panel indicating the criteria governing their appointment. [38868]

The Prime Minister: The members of the Security Vetting Appeals Panel are as follows:

Sir Anthony May (Chairman)

Dame Janet Smith DCB (Deputy Chairman)

Sir John Blelloch KCB

Sir Peter Woodward KCB

Mr. Peter Jones

Dr. George Gray.

The membership of the panel has been drawn up to reflect a range of interests. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman are senior members of the judiciary, currently a Lord Justice of Appeal and a High Court Judge respectively. The other Panel members have a background, at a senior level, in the Civil Service, the Armed Forces, the trades unions and industry, and related experience in security matters.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stormont

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what areas of the Stormont estate have been taken over for *(a)* building and *(b)* paving since 1 January 1993; for what purposes and what planning permission was sought; what buildings are temporary; and how many car parking spaces are provided on the Stormont estate. [37160]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 January 1993, 3.31 acres in total of the Stormont Estate have been used for the sites of new temporary buildings (2.782 acres) or paving (.526 acres). The requirement for additional accommodation was brought about as a consequence of the fire in Parliament Buildings, the need to relieve overcrowding in other buildings in the Estate and to make provision for the political negotiations at Block B, Castle Buildings, which also required the creation of new car parking facilities elsewhere.

While the Crown is not bound by planning legislation, there is a procedure by which the Planning Service is consulted before Crown development proceeds. This consultation procedure was not followed in relation to the erection of a number of temporary buildings in the Stormont Estate because they were urgently required, namely:

6 Temporary Buildings in Main Castle Buildings Car Park

Temporary building at Block B for press and catering

Temporary accommodation within walled garden at Stormont Castle

Temporary building at Massey Avenue.

Other buildings erected after 1 January 1993, namely a temporary building at Craigantlet Buildings and a temporary store at Maynard Sinclair Pavilion, followed consultation procedure with the Planning Service.

There are presently 2,261 parking slots in the Stormont Estate.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make it her policy to support the creation of an all-Ireland tourist authority. [37978]

Mr. Ingram: The creation of an all-Ireland tourist authority will be a matter for consideration by the representatives of the proposed Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas meeting to consider this and other matters under the auspices of the proposed North/South Ministerial Council.

However, it should be noted that Bord Failte (Irish Tourist Board) and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) already co-operate closely in taking forward "Tourism Brand Ireland", a major all-Ireland promotional campaign launched in Autumn 1996.

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nurses were recruited by each trust and how many nurses left each trust *(a)* through retirement, *(b)* to work for a nursing agency and *(c)* for other reasons in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [39303]

Mr. Worthington: Details of the number of nurses recruited and the number of nurses who left each trust in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98 are set out in the table. The reasons for leaving are not held centrally.

Number of nurses who left and joined each trust between 1995—1998

	Leavers			Joiners		
Trust	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*April–December[1] 1997*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*April–December[1] 1997*
Belfast City Hospital	29	26	22	45	37	25
Down and Lisburn	15	60	20	60	62	40
Green Park Trust	11	10	9	46	43	34
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	14	1	6	29	39	35
North Down and Ards	4	3	3	39	24	22
North and West Belfast	9	8	19	57	39	50
Royal Group Hospital Trust	43	27	21	134	105	72
South and East Belfast	54	21	14	19	2	34
UNDAH Trust	19	30	52	82	77	47
Causeway	7	17	14	68	59	43
Homefirst Community[3]	20	20	7	26	21	25
United Hospitals Group[3]	15	22	15	65	69	80
Armagh and Dungannon[3]	8	9	9	30	37	15
Craigavon Area Hospital	3	29	6	53	17	44
C'avon/B'bridge Community	1	6	2	3	4	7
Newry and Mourne	3	19	12	68	59	40
Altnagelvin HSS Trust[3]	15	6	25	68	69	78
Foyle HSS Community Trust[3]	5	9	12	45	72	29
Omagh and Fermanagh	44	[2]n/a	[2]n/a	65	[2]n/a	[2]n/a
Sperrin Lakeland Trust[3]	[2]n/a	11	9	[2]n/a	52	51

[1] Figures for 1997–98 are available for the first 9 months only
[2] Not available
[3] These Providers did not obtain Trust status until 1996–97

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Reviews

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns *507–10*, on departmental reviews, if the inter-departmental review of the Treatment of Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses announced on 13 June 1997 has been completed; and if he proposes to publish its findings. [39377]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 22 April 1998]:* My right hon. Friend and I are currently considering how to take forward the final report of the inter-departmental working group on vulnerable or intimidated witnesses which we received recently.

Remand Prisoners (Drugs and Alcohol)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many remand prisoners were assessed to have *(a)* a drug abuse problem and *(b)* an alcohol abuse problem on admission, by region, for each of the past five years. [39369]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Poverty

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will publish the results of the study commissioned by her Department into a rights-based approach to poverty elimination. [39345]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development has not commissioned a study on a rights-based approach to poverty elimination. However, we have funded the production of a paper by the NGO Rights and Humanity, on a Human Rights Approach to Development, which will be published shortly. I will arrange for a copy to be sent to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sustainable Development

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she has made with her European counterparts in submitting a draft decision to the Commission on Sustainable Development

to take forward the UN General Assembly Special Session decision on national sustainable development strategies; and if she will make a statement. [39344]

Clare Short: Under the UK Presidency, the EU has agreed a position to promote national sustainable development strategies which has been formally submitted to other countries and which is currently being pursued at the session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in New York.

Emergency Aid

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she has taken to review the co-ordination arrangements between Whitehall departments involved in emergency aid interventions. [39346]

Clare Short: Emergency aid interventions are co-ordinated by the Department for International Development in consultation with other Whitehall departments as necessary. These arrangements are kept under continuous review to ensure their effectiveness. Whenever appropriate, formal co-ordination mechanisms are established for specific emergency situations.

Swaziland

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will list those projects funded either in part or whole in Swaziland in each of the past three years, identifying each project by *(a)* name, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose; [39393]

(2) if she will list the *(a)* name, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose of projects currently funded, either solely or in partnership, in Swaziland. [39394]

Clare Short: The UK-Swaziland development partnership concentrates on tackling poverty and public sector reform. Bilateral expenditure in the last financial year was over £2.5 million (provisional) and we expect to spend a similar amount in the current financial year. The table lists current projects and those funded during the past three financial years.

Project title	*Project purpose*	*Institutional location*
Swaziland Water Services Corps Phase I & II	To improve water supply and sewerage services in urban areas through the creation of an efficient parastatal organisation	Ministry of Housing & Urban Development[1]
Assistance to Buildings Branch	To expedite the Public Sector Building programme in an efficient cost effective manner, to reduce costs, improve quality and delays in construction	Ministry of Public Works
Primary Education project	Strengthening of the primary education system	Ministry of Education[1]
Public Sector Management Programme	To assist the Government of Swaziland to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its civil service	Ministry of Finance[1]
Police Development Project	To assist the RSP in producing a Police Development Plan and produce an action plan to implement it. Then to assist in the implementation	Prime Ministers Office[1]
Support to Swaziland Environmental Authority	To enable the SEA to more effectively address and resolve environmental concerns in Swaziland	Ministry of Tourism & Environment[1]
Assistance to the Ministry of Finance	Assist the Ministry of Finance to reduce its budget deficit through strengthening policy and planning, and revenue collection, and provision of management advice	Ministry of Finance[1]
Enterprise Development	Consultancy & advisory support to assist the establishment and operation of the Swaziland Enterprise Fund	Ministry of Enterprise & Employment[1]
Poverty Alleviation Programme	Preparatory workshop and funding to local NGOs to implement poverty focused projects in the rural areas of Swaziland	Swaziland Council of NGO's[1]
King's Office	Technical Co-operation adviser for the King of Swaziland	King's Office[1]
Institutional Strengthening of the Public Enterprise Unit	To ensure that the PEU has a full complement of trained staff and is appropriately resourced to implement the PEU Act without reliance on Donor Support	Ministry of Finance[1]

Project title	Project purpose	Institutional location
Surveyor General's Department (Phase I-III)	Establish sustainable capacity within the Surveyor General's Department to develop and implement Business plans to complete the process of localisation of ODA supported posts	Ministry of Natural Resources & Energy[1]
TCO Education Co-ordinator	Co-ordinate education projects in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland	Ministry of Education
Land Resource Management Consultancy	To advise on the institutional structures for land administration	Ministry of Natural Resources & Energy
Constitutional Review Commission	To assist in the process of the review of the Constitution of the kingdom of Swaziland	Prime Ministers Office
Development of a national lands policy	The development of an acceptable national lands policy for Swaziland	Ministry of Natural Resources & Energy[1]
Aids Readers	To educate young Swazis about the danger of Aids	Ministry of Health
Community Dams Project	To ensure a constant water supply for the communities served by "Nsaliteje" and "Site 9" community dams in the South East of Swaziland	Swaziland Farm Development Foundation
Yonge Nawe Project	To increase understanding of environmental concerns and conservation practices among children	Skillshare Africa[2]
Swaziland Women's Centre	To increase the profitability and extent of small scale enterprise undertaken by rural women	Skillshare Africa[2]
Women's Financial Trust	To provide practical services to meet need for financial and technical assistance	Skillshare Africa[1,2]
Hospice at Home	To improve the health and economic status of Swazi families with members suffering from AIDS and other terminal illnesses	Skillshare Africa[1,2]
Support for CBO's	To support the ability of Community Based Organisations to organise themselves to initiate and implement projects	World University Service[1,2]
Funding for Core Projects	To advocate for enabling legislation and formulation of policies for the development, protection and welfare of children	Save the Children Fund[2]

[1] Projects funded during the current 1998–99 financial year
[2] Projects funded by the Joint Funding Scheme

Maternal Mortality

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the rate of maternal mortality from *(a)* acute respiratory infection, *(b)* diarrhoeal disease and *(c)* measles, as a proportion of total mortality in those refugee camps to which her Department provides assistance. [38643]

Clare Short: Maternal mortality is defined by the World Health Organisation as the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of the end of pregnancy from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy. The leading global causes of maternal mortality are severe bleeding, infection, unsafe abortion, eclampsia and obstructed labour. It is estimated that there are 585,000 such deaths throughout the world per year. However, the death of a woman due to causes such as acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea disease and measles is classed as an adult death and we do not have data on adult female mortality for these causes.

Nuclear Smuggling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aspects of the support her Department gives under the *(a)* Tacis, *(b)* Phare and *(c)* other assistance programmes to Eastern European and former states of the Soviet Union, are aimed at combating the smuggling of nuclear materials from these countries to (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) the EU. [38724]

Clare Short: The Phare and Tacis programmes (to which we contributed about 14.6 per cent. of their total

expenditure of 1,750 mecu in 1997) contain nuclear safety programmes which have been used to provide advice to countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia on the safe handling and storage of nuclear materials, including specific provision of a nuclear materials accountancy system in the region. Assistance from Phare and Tacis has also helped to improve border controls in the region, and should have had an indirect effect on smuggling of nuclear materials into the EU. Other multilateral institutions, such as the EBRD, to whom we contribute, have some activities in the nuclear safety sector; details are not immediately available to us. Assistance in this sector is not a priority for my Department's bilateral programme of technical assistance.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Conferences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many of his officials attended conferences *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas; and how many and what percentage made (i) oral and (ii) written contributions to the matters under discussion in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [31181]

Mr. Tom Clarke: In the period 1 March 1997 to 28 February 1998, 113 of my officials attended conferences in the UK, with 18 attending conferences overseas. Forty four made oral contributions and 17 made written contributions.

HEALTH

Primary Care

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from GPs on the effect on the incomes of GPs of participating in primary care groups; and if he will make a statement. [39287]

Mr. Milburn: We have regular meetings with all primary health care representative bodies, and the income of general practitioners participating in primary care groups is just one among a number of issues discussed. These issues will continue to be discussed, and guidance on various financial matters will be issued in the summer. These professional bodies are supportive of this Government's initiative to develop a new National Health Service, modern and dependable.

Public Spending

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the growth in public spending between 1997–98 and 1998–99 on health and social services in England relative to the previous three year period. [38259]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is shown in the table.

Government expenditure on health and personal social services (England)

£ million

	1994–95 outturn	*1995–96 outturn*	*1996–97 outturn*	*1997–98 estimated outturn*	*1998–99 plans*
Cash growth over previous year	1,812	1,332	910	1,526	1,828
Percentage growth over previous year (cash)	6.1	4.2	2.8	4.5	5.2

Dead Patients

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist concerning the length of time for removing a body from a bed in a public general ward when a patient is believed to have died. [39371]

Mr. Milburn: This is a matter for local determination. However, I would expect deceased patients to be removed from public general wards sensitively and as soon as possible.

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were recruited by each NHS trust and how many nurses left each trust *(a)* through retirement, *(b)* to work for a nursing agency and *(c)* for other reasons in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [39302]

Mr. Milburn: Information about the numbers of nurses joining and leaving National Health Service trusts is collected by the Office of Manpower Economics. A summary of the results of the Office of Manpower Economics survey is published each year in the report of the review body for nurses, midwives and health visitors, copies of which are in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the national roll-out of the New Deal. [38257]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Although it is early days, the national roll-out of the New Deal has seen an encouraging start. In the first week 2,435 Gateway interviews were held.

A good indication of how New Deal has been received is that over 2,600 young people have asked for early entry. This builds on good results from the twelve Pathfinder areas.

Government Funding (Essex)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount of

Government funding allocated to Essex County Council for the purposes of education for 1998–99; and what amount the Council has budgeted to spend. [36486]

Mr. Byers: Government support for education spending is provided mainly through the education SSA system but these are not recommended levels of expenditure. Essex's education SSA for 1998–99 is some £497 million—an increase of some £27 million or 5.8 per cent. I understand that Essex budgeted to spend some £475 million on education in 1997–98, £5 million more than the SSA for education (allowing for local government reorganisation) and has budgeted to spend some £494 million in 1998–99 which is £3 million less than its education SSA.

Training and Enterprise Councils (Greater London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the economic development initiatives currently being funded by training and enterprise councils in Greater London from their accumulated reserves; and if he will make a statement. [38372]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is given in tables, copies of which I have placed in the Library.

Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to amend the Social Security (Students) Regulations 1998 to allow students who for bona fide reasons take time out from their studies to have access to state benefits. [39021]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Financial support is already available for higher education students who take time out from their studies owing to illness. In England and Wales, the Mandatory Awards Regulations provide that when a student is ill, the Local Education Authority (LEA) must continue to make payments under the award for 28 days. If a student remains ill after 28 days, the LEA has discretion to continue payments. Where a student has been absent from the course through illness for 28 weeks, he or she may apply for Income Support. At this point, the LEA support would be expected to cease. In England and Wales, the LEA also has discretion to continue support for other bona fide reasons.

In Scotland, students who are necessarily absent from their course owing to illness, but who intend to resume as soon as circumstances permit, may continue to receive maintenance from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) so long as they remain enrolled on the course.

We are considering what further action we might take on support for students forced to take time out from their studies.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the expected debt on graduation of a student entering a three-year undergraduate course in the autumn of 1998 under *(a)* the Government's student tuition fees proposals and *(b)* the Dearing Committee's proposals assuming receipt of a full maintenance grant; and if he will make a statement. [39328]

Dr. Howells: The maximum amount that a student can borrow will depend on the place of study, as well as the student's and his or her parents' or spouse's income. Under the Government's proposals, a student completing a three-year course outside London which began in 1998 and who took out the full loan available each year might expect to have borrowed a total of £9,355 in 1998 prices. The comparable figure under the Dearing Committee's proposals would be £8,083, assuming full implementation in 1998/99. Repayments under our proposed system will be made only when a graduate's income exceeds £10,000 a year and the level of repayments will then be linked directly to the individual's income above that amount. A graduate with an income of £17,000 per annum, for example, would make weekly repayments of about £12 a week.

Students and their families will be expected to contribute no more up front to the costs of their higher education under our proposals than they would under the current arrangements. Our proposals will ensure that students have access to the funds which they need while they are studying while generating substantial additional resources for investment in higher and further education.

Employment Action Plan

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place copies of the United Kingdom's Employment Action Plan in the Library. [39732]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Copies of the Employment Action Plan, which sets out the Government's policies for implementing the Employment Guidelines agreed at the Special European Council held in Luxembourg in November 1997, have been placed in the Library. The Plan contains the latest information on employment policy, including the announcements made by the Chancellor in his Budget on 17 March.

Disability Rights Commission

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the recommendations of the Disability Rights Task Force on the role and functions of a Disability Rights Commission will be made available. [39842]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The recommendations of the Disability Rights Task Force on the role and functions of a Disability Rights Commission were provided before Easter. They are currently under consideration across Government. The recommendations may be accessed, as can other Task Force papers, via the Internet (on website www.disability.gov.uk). Copies of the recommendations have also been placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Treasury Grant

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on her plans for the Treasury Grant. [38245]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 9 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *88–90.*

We have no plans to change the basis on which Treasury Grant is made available to the National Insurance Fund.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gardening Leave

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many diplomatic staff members, in each grade, were on gardening leave on 31 March for each year since 1997; and for what reason staff were on gardening leave. [38952]

Mr. Fatchett: There are no officers on gardening leave, but the hon. Member may like to know that on 31 March 1997, 15 officers were on standby while awaiting a new assignment. On 31 March 1998 the figure was 8.

Commonwealth Business Council

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made to set up the Commonwealth Business Council, as agreed at the Edinburgh Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. [39840]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The first meeting of the Commonwealth Business Council took place in London on 20 and 21 April under the chairmanship of Lord Cairns, with Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa as Vice-Chairman. It was attended by a number of leading business persons from throughout the Commonwealth. As agreed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, its objective is to promote greater private sector involvement in the promotion of trade and investment, and thus prosperity, throughout the Commonwealth. The British Government were pleased to provide £250,000 towards the Council's start-up costs. We hope that other Commonwealth Governments and the private sector will also want to contribute to this most valuable initiative.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Arms Embargo)

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the steps taken by the Government to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1160 imposing an arms embargo on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [39841]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The EU already imposes an arms embargo on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The UK's interpretation of this embargo covers all goods and technology in Part III of Schedule I to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended (the so-called "Military List").

Following the adoption by the UN Security Council on 31 March of Resolution 1160 as a result of the recent violence in Kosovo, the Privy Council have made Orders in Council giving full effect to the action which the UK is required to take. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1998; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (United Nations Sanctions) (Dependent Territories) Order 1998; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (United Nations Sanctions) (Channel Islands) Order 1998; and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (United Nations Sanctions) (Isle of Man) Order 1998 were approved by the Privy Council on 22 April, and will come into force on 24 April. As a result of these Orders a licence will be required to supply any goods on the Military List to the FRY, so bringing under control such supplies abroad by UK-registered companies or nationals.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Committees of Inquiry

Mr. Allan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all departmental committees of inquiry which have been established since May 1995, indicating the date of establishment and name of the chairman; and if he will separately identify those departmental inquiries which have been set up by Ministers which have sought expert or lay opinion and which have been chaired by an individual outside Government. [35749]

Dr. David Clark: "Departmental Committee of Inquiry" is a term usually applied only to inquiries which have been set up by Ministers, which have sought expert or lay opinion, and which have normally been chaired by an individual outside Government. The following list details those inquiries established in this way since May 1995.

The list excludes advisory committees established to provide on-going advice (such as those advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1997"), task forces and reviews set up since May 1997 to provide policy advice and recommendations (as listed in the Written Answer to a Question from Lord Chesham provided by my noble Friend Lord McIntosh of Haringey in the other place on 12 February 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns *231–44* and inquiries set up routinely in pursuance of responsibilities under a statutory requirement, for example public inquiries held under planning legislation.

Departmental committees of inquiry

Department	*Committee*	*Date established*	*Chairman*
Departmental Inquiries			
MAFF, DH, SO, WO, NIO	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Inquiry	December 1997	Lord Justice Phillips
DFEE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education	February 1996	Lord Dearing
DFEE	Literary Task Force	May 1996	Professor Michael Barber
DETR	Merchant Vessel Derbyshire	September 1995	Lord Donaldson
DETR	Review of the Area Cost Adjustment	October 1995	Professor Robert Elliott
DETR	Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee	March 1996	Professor Ronald Edwards
DH	Utting Children's Safeguards Review	June 1996	Sir William Utting

Departmental committees of inquiry

Department	*Committee*	*Date established*	*Chairman*
DH	Committee of Inquiry into the Personality Disorder Unit, Ashworth Special Hospital, Merseyside	February 1997	His Honour Peter Fallon QC
DH	Review of Prescribing, Supply and Administration of Medicines	March 1997	Dr. June Crown
DH	Review of cervical screening services in Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust	June 1997	Sir William Wells
HO	Inquiry into Legislation Against Terrorism	December 1995	Lord Lloyd of Berwick
HO	Assessment and Implications of Centrifuge Contamination in the Trace Explosive Section of the Forensic Explosives Laboratory at Fort Halstead	May 1996	Professor Brian Caddy
HO	Scrutiny of evidence relating to the Hillsborough disaster	June 1997	Lord Justice Stuart-Smith
HO	Inquiry under the Police Act 1996 into matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence	August 1997	Sir William Macpherson of Cluny
HO	Review of Financial Regulation in the Crown Dependencies	January 1998	Mr. Andrew Edwards
LCD	Review of the law relating to profits of crime	March 1997	Professor Gareth Jones
NIO	The International Body	November 1995	Senator George Mitchell
NIO	Review of Northern Ireland Police Complaints System	November 1995	Dr. Maurice Hayes
NIO	Independent Review of Parades and Marches for Northern Ireland	July 1996	Dr. Peter North
NIO	The Steele Inquiry into incidents at HM Prison Maze	March 1997	Mr. John Steele[1]
NIO	Victims of Violence	October 1997	Sir Kenneth Bloomfield
NIO	The Narey Inquiry into incidents at HM Prison Maze	December 1997	Mr. Martin Narey[1]
NICS	Staff Deployment in the Northern Ireland Civil Service	March 1997	Dr. Maurice Hayes
SO	Inquiry into the Appointment Practices of Monklands District Council	July 1995	Mr. W. A. Nimmo Smith QC
SO	Inquiry into the Appointment of Chief Officers in North Lanarkshire Council	December 1995	Mr. D. I. K. MacLeod WS
SO	Severe Weather Working Party	January 1996	Mr. Stephen Hampson[1]
SO	The Pennington Group—report on the circumstances leading to the 1996 outbreak of infection with E. coli 0157 in Central Scotland, the implications for food safety and the lessons to be learned	November 1996	Professor Hugh Pennington
SO	Review of an Eye Transplantation/CJD Incident in 1997	November 1997	Sir William Stewart FRS
SO	Inquiry into Diesel Spill at Burncrooks Water Treatment Works	December 1997	Mr. Robert Fraser OBE
DTI	Long Term Feedstock Supply Group	January 1998	Mr. Martyn Baker[1] and Mr. David Saunders[1]
Tribunals of Inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921			
NIO	Tribunal into the Events of 30 January 1972 (the Bloody Sunday Inquiry)	January 1998	Lord Saville of Newdigate
SO	Inquiry into the Dunblane Shootings	March 1996	Lord Cullen
WO	Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Care in North Wales	June 1996	Sir. Ronald Waterhouse
Royal Commissions			
DH	Royal Commission on Long-Term Care	December 1997	Professor Sir Stewart Sutherland

[1] Civil Servant

WALES

Economic Regulation Review

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the review of economic regulation in Wales to be published. [38805]

Mr. Hain: The Economic Strategy for Wales will be published in early summer. It will have no regulatory content.

New Deal

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the Wales New Deal Advisory Task Force to report. [38926]

Mr. Hain: The Wales New Deal Advisory Task Force reports to Ministers at quarterly meetings. These are held alternately with the Task Force Chairman and with the full Task Force. The next such meeting is scheduled for 27 April.

Film Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what ways and by what amounts he has assisted the film industry in Wales. [39430]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Welsh Office does not provide direct support for the film industry but Sgrin, the new Media Agency for Wales which replaced the Wales Film Council and Screen Wales, receives a large part of its core funding from the Arts Council of Wales, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation and the Welsh Development Agency. The Arts Council has also awarded £2.2 million of Lottery money to 21 film projects in Wales.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the trust formed by the merging of the Maelor Hospital Trust and the Clwydian Community Trust to be operational; and if he will make a statement. [39437]

Mr. Win Griffiths: If it is decided to proceed with the merger of the NHS trusts in this area, the new trust will become operational on 1 April 1999. However, this is subject to the outcome of the forthcoming public consultation exercise.

Public Health

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to introduce health action zones in Wales. [38365]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), on 22 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *806*.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the link between poverty and ill health in Wales. [38367]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Chief Medical Officer's 1996 Annual Report examined the links between Health, Work and the Economy (Chapter 5). Overall, the report concluded that the excess of people who are economically inactive in Wales is due, firstly to a higher prevalence of limiting long-term illness, and secondly to a higher proportion of the long-term ill not working. There is evidence to suggest a correlation between poor living and working conditions and illness and disease. For example, the Welsh Health Survey (1995) found that people doing unskilled work have higher than average levels of heart disease, respiratory disease, mental illness, arthritis and pain.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the advantages to the health of the people in Wales of a closer working relationship between health services and social services. [38366]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Effective joint working between health services and social services is essential if vulnerable people are to receive high quality care which meets their needs and provides good value for money.

The recent Audit Commission report 'Coming of Age' demonstrated that improved joint planning and investment by health and local authorities is needed. The Welsh Office has therefore issued guidance seeking better collaboration at a local level to improve the quality and range of services provided for vulnerable and older people. I have agreed a programme of follow up action to support this process and ensure that priority is given to securing strategic operational change in this vital area. There is a clear agenda for health and local authorities to address together which will have significant benefits when fully implemented.

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nurses were recruited by each trust and how many nurses left each trust *(a)* through retirement, *(b)* to work for a nursing agency and *(c)* for other reasons in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [39301]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is not held centrally. However, data on the number of qualified nurses recruited by each Trust and the overall number leaving each Trust in the years 1996–97 and 1997–98 are being collected but they will not be available until later in the year. I will write to the hon. Member when the data become available.

Gwent Tertiary College

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what report on the position of the College in respect of European funding the Corporation of Gwent Tertiary College received at their June 1997 meeting; what was the substance of that report; and what action they took in response to it; [39440]

(2) how much Gwent Tertiary College estimates that they will have to repay to the European Union; and how much ESF money has been withheld by the EU to date for projects already agreed to; [39441]

(3) what is the surplus projected by Gwent Tertiary College for 1997–98; and what account has been taken of *(a)* moneys withheld by and *(b)* sums required to be repaid to the EU. [39442]

Mr. Hain: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible. Detailed questions of this kind are largely matters for the college itself or for the Department for Education and Employment but, as he is aware, I am anxious that he receives all the information I can provide for him on this matter.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Repairs

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future arrangements for the in-house deep repair of aircraft. [39844]

Dr. Reid: The deep repair and overhaul of aviation equipment are currently provided in the Ministry of Defence facilities (known as Third Line) and by industry (known as Fourth line). Third Line work is currently undertaken by two separate Defence Agencies, the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO) for helicopters and the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency (RAF MGDA) for fixed wing aircraft.

We now propose to bring together Third Line repair in a single management structure, which would be known as the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA). I will be setting work in hand immediately in order to launch the DARA as a new Agency on 1 April 1999 with a view to moving the organisation to Trading Fund Status as soon as practicable thereafter.

The aim is to recruit a Chief Executive for the DARA by open competition to take forward this challenging task. The Agency will be overseen by an Owner's Board chaired by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings of sub-group E on chemical and biological defence of the Technical Co-operation Programme have taken place since 1 January 1995; which countries took part in these meetings; where these meetings were held; and who represented the British Government at each meeting. [38612]

Mr. Spellar: The Technical Co-operation Programme, TTCP, involves collaboration between the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. In 1997, the TTCP structure was reorganised and the former Sub-group E was renamed the Group on Chemical, Biological and Radiological Defence.

Since 1 January 1995, the Group has met annually in June. The 1995 meeting took place in Melbourne, Australia and was attended by Director CBD Porton Down as UK National Leader. In 1996, the meeting was held at the Chemical and Biological Defence sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, DERA, at Porton Down in the United Kingdom and was attended by Director CBD Porton Down as Executive Chairman plus an assistant and Chief Scientist, CBD Sector as UK National Leader. The 1997 meeting was held at Edgewood in the United States and was attended by MD Science, DERA as Executive Chairman, together with an assistant and Director CBD Sector as UK National Representative. All British attendees were MOD staff.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many International Task forces have been established under the 1980 Memorandum of Understanding on chemical and biological defence between Britain, the United States of America and Canada since 1 January 1995; and what subjects each of these task forces cover. [38610]

Mr. Spellar: Seven International Task forces have been established under the 1980 Memorandum of Understanding on chemical and biological defence between Britain, the United States of America and Canada since 1 January 1995. They cover collaboration between the three nations to address defences against chemical and biological agents of concern. I am unable to give the individual topics as these are classified and I am therefore withholding these details under exemption 1 of Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the technical panels and action groups which have been active under sub-group E on chemical and biological defence of the Technical Co-operation Programme since 1 January 1995. [38613]

Mr. Spellar: The Technical Co-operation Programme, TTCP, involves collaboration between the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. In 1997, the TTCP structure was re-organised and the former sub-group E was renamed the Group on Chemical, Biological and Radiological Defence.

The technical panels active since 1 January 1995 are:

Biological warfare countermeasures;

Chemical and biological hazard assessment;

Biological agent detection;

Low burden individual protective clothing.

The action groups since 1 January 1995 are:

Gene probes;

Medical countermeasures against vesicant agents;

Absorbents;

Decontamination of chemical and biological hazards;

Treaty analytical methodologies;

Gene probes II;

Radiological hazards.

Death Penalty

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the benefits of removing the death penalty from military law; and if he will make a statement. [39220]

Dr. Reid: During the passage of the Armed Forces Act 1996 it was suggested that the death penalty, in the Service context, should be abolished. As a result the previous administration undertook to carry out a fundamental review of the need to retain the death penalty as a maximum punishment for certain offences under Service law. This work is in progress. I will advise the House of the outcome as soon as possible.

TREASURY

Gaming Machines

20. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from working men's clubs regarding the effect of the Budget on gaming machines. [38263]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has received one representation from the National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs.

Sterling

21. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the advantages to Britain of a weaker pound; and if he will make a statement. [38265]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Government have made clear that we have taken the decisions that are important for creating a stable and competitive pound over the medium term. The best thing the Government can do to help British industry is to ensure businesses have the stability to plan and invest with confidence, avoiding a return to the boom and bust past which damaged prosperity and destroyed jobs.

35. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he is having with the Governor of the Bank of England concerning the level of the pound sterling. [38279]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I have regular meetings with the Governor at which a range of matters are discussed.

International Debt

22. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from Church leaders on his policy to reduce the debt burden of the poorest countries. [38266]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have made considerable progress in securing international agreement to the Mauritius Mandate and will continue to press for its speedy and determined implementation. Since his Mauritius Mandate statement to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers last September, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has held a number of meetings with religious leaders and NGO heads to discuss the issue of debt relief and keep them informed of progress.

25. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to reduce the debt burden of the poorest countries. [38269]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government are fully committed to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative that was launched by the IMF and World Bank in September 1996. In his speech to Commonwealth Finance Ministers in Mauritius last year, the Chancellor called on the international community to commit itself to dealing with the problem of unsustainable debt burdens faced by the world's poorest countries once and for all. He urged creditors and debtors to undertake action in order to ensure that at least three-quarters of the twenty countries, initially identified by the World Bank and IMF as probably needing debt relief under the HIPC initiative, have had decisions on the size and timing of their relief by the year 2000.

The Chancellor also encouraged all countries identified under the initiative to embark on the process of securing debt relief by the millennium.

The Government have made considerable progress towards securing international commitment to implementing the Mauritius Mandate. The Government will continue in their efforts to ensure that the Mauritius Mandate targets are met.

31. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on his policy to reduce the debt burden of the poorest countries. [38275]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor has recently given evidence to the International Development Committee of this House, and has attended the IMF and World Bank Spring meetings in Washington.

32. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with Church leaders in relation to reducing the debt burden of the poorest countries. [38276]

Mrs. Liddell: Since his Mauritius Mandate statement to Commonwealth Finance Ministers last September, the Chancellor has held a number of meetings with religious leaders and NGO heads to discuss the issue of debt relief.

Income Tax (Derbyshire)

23. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the percentages of income tax payers paying the higher rate in *(a)* Derbyshire and *(b)* the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [38267]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1995–96, the latest year for which there is comparable information, 5 per cent. of taxpayers in Derbyshire paid income tax at the higher rate, compared with 8.1 per cent. in the United Kingdom. It is not possible to provide a reliable breakdown below the United Kingdom level for 1998–99.

Budget (Work Incentives)

24. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Budget measures to increase the financial incentive to work. [38268]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Budget contained a comprehensive set of measures to help ensure that work pays, including the Working Families Tax Credit and reform to National Insurance Contributions.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

28. **Mr. Charles Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the definition of the public sector borrowing requirement. [38272]

Mr. Darling: The public sector borrowing requirement measures borrowing by the whole public sector from the private sector and overseas.

33. **Mr. White:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the definition of the public sector borrowing requirement used in other European Union countries; and what plans he has for changes to the UK's PSBR definition. [38277]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Other EU Member States use a range of definitions of government borrowing. There will be a number of small technical changes to the definition of the PSBR later this year resulting from the construction of national accounts according to the definitions in the European System of Accounts 1995 (ESA95). These changes were set out in Annexe B of the March 1998 *Financial Statement and Budget Report.*

Advance Corporation Tax

29. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much extra revenue will be raised in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 by the abolition of advance corporation tax and the introduction of quarterly payments of corporation tax. [38273]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the March 1998 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" Table C.1 and paragraph C.87.

Pensioners' Fuel Bills

30. **Mr. Darvill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from pensioners' organisations on his tax and benefit changes to reduce pensioners' fuel bills. [38274]

Dawn Primarolo: The payments of £50 to pensioner households on income support and £20 to all other pensioner households have been generally welcomed.

Savings Ratio

34. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the savings ratio, in the latest year for which figures are available; and what is his forecast for the savings ratio for *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [38278]

Mrs. Liddell: The personal sector saving ratio was 11 per cent. in 1997. A modest cyclical fall in the saving ratio is expected over the next three years. But over the longer term the introduction of ISAs and policies to promote economic growth and stability will increase the incentive to save for investment.

EU Deficits

36. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many EU member states have deficits of less than 3 per cent. of gross domestic product. [38280]

Mr. Gordon Brown: According to the Commission's Convergence Report, 14 Member States had a government balance in 1997 which was better than or equal to the Maastricht reference value for the deficit of 3 per cent. of GDP.

Duty-free Sales

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from companies operating from Newhaven on the impact of the abolition of duty-free sales. [38270]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received a number of representations from companies located throughout the United Kingdom about the abolition of intra-European union duty free sales in June 1999. However, no records are held which would readily identify the geographical locations of those companies. Obtaining the information cannot be undertaken except at disproportionate cost.

Working Families Tax Credit

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his proposals for a working families tax credit. [38271]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Working Families Tax Credit has been welcomed by a wide range of individuals and organisations.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* range of fluctuation and *(b)* average exchange rate of sterling against the deutschmark in (i) the period May 1996-May 1997 and (ii) the period since May 1997. [39317]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 23 April 1998:

As the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the exchange rate of sterling against the Deutsche Mark.

The figures are shown below and are drawn from observations of indicative middle-market (mean of spot buying and selling) rates as observed by the Bank of England Foreign Exchange Desk in the London interbank market during late afternoon trading.

Range of fluctuation and average rate of sterling against Deutsche Mark

	Lowest	*Highest*	*Average*
May 1996-May 1997	2.2795	2.8202	2.5242
May 1997 to date	2.7915	3.0970	2.9429

Information on exchange rates of sterling against other currencies is published in Table 7.1A of the ONS monthly publication *Financial Statistics*, and on the ONS database, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library. The data is produced by Bank of England.

Planning Policy Guidance

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to develop economic instruments to support planning policy guidance. [38999]

Mr. Darling: In his Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred to the ongoing work on the potential of a tax on the extraction of aggregates. Other economic instruments that could be used to further the Government's planning policies are being kept under review.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 April 1998

TREASURY

Disability Benefits

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Green Paper on Welfare Reform, if the Government's definition of universal national benefits would cover disability living allowance *(a)* subject to taxation and *(b)* means-tested. [38867]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 April 1998]:* The Welfare Reform Green Paper sets the framework for the review of disability living allowance, rather than offer detailed proposals for reform. However it makes it clear that disability living allowance will remain a universal, national benefit and as such will not be subject to a means test.

Consumer Prices Index

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will express the Bank of England's inflation target in terms of the harmonised index of consumer prices. [39571]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government's inflation target of 2½ per cent. was confirmed in the March Budget. It is defined as the 12-month increase in the Retail Prices Index excluding mortgage interest payments (RPIX).

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he has issued to the Monetary Policy Committee on the account it should take of trends in the harmonised index of consumer prices where they differ from the RPI trend. [39575]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor's guidance to the Monetary Policy Committee is set out in his remit letter of 12 June 1997.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned on the accuracy of the RPI as a measure of inflation. [39570]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 24 April 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the accuracy of the RPI as a measure of inflation.

The ONS is currently engaged in research into a number of aspects of RPI accuracy. Some of it is described in an article in the October 1997 issue of *Economic Trends*, pages 56–62; a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

The ONS has also commissioned work from the University of Cardiff Business School, the Institute of Fiscal Studies, The University of Sheffield and Simon Fraser University, British Columbia.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the principal factors which underlie differences in trends of *(a)* the RPI and *(b)* the harmonised indices of consumer prices. [39566]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 24 April 1998:

As the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the assessment of the principal factors which underline differences in trends between the retail prices index (RPI) and the harmonised index of consumer prices (HICP).

A recent analysis of these trends was published in an article about the HICP in *Economic Trends* No. 531, February 1998, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. The analysis showed that, during 1997, the trend in the HICP annual rate of inflation was broadly similar to that for RPI excluding mortgage interest payments (RPIX). During this period, the annual rate of inflation for the HICP was, on average, 0.9 percentage points lower than RPIX of which:

i. the effect of using the geometric mean in the HICP for the calculation of elementary aggregates of prices at the most basic level, as opposed to arithmetic means in the RPIX, contributed 0.5 percentage points to the difference between the two inflation measures.

ii. coverage differences, such as the exclusion of Council Tax, house depreciation and some health and education expenditure from the HICP, in addition to the inclusion of a series for personal computers in the HICP (excluded from the RPI prior to January 1998) contributed a further 0.4 percentage points to the difference between the two measures of inflation.

Self-assessment

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated financial impact of reductions in the number of Inland Revenue staff in 1998–99; what consultation with trades unions took place on this matter; and what assessment he has made of the impact of staff reductions on the Revenue's capacity to deal with self-assessment of taxation. [38068]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has no plans to reduce staff numbers during 1998–99. Existing staffing plans, drawn up before the Budget, indicate that employee numbers will remain broadly level, at just under 50,000, over the course of the year. This has been discussed with union representatives. Adequate numbers of trained people are in place to deal with Self Assessment.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the payment of tuition fees to be set against income for tax purposes. [39028]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax relief is already available for certain payments made for vocational training. Details of the relief are given in the Inland Revenue leaflet IR119

"Tax relief for vocational training". While we have no plans to introduce an expensive general tax relief for tuition fees, the hon. Gentleman should be aware from our recent consultation paper on the Learning Age (Cm 3790) that we are considering targeted public support to encourage people to open individual learning accounts which might involve tax incentives.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will allow the payment of tuition fees for full-time undergraduates to be set against income for personal taxation purposes. [39030]

Dawn Primarolo: Help is already available to those who need it most. It would not be appropriate to give tax relief to those able to afford the fees.

Inflation Target

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis he set an inflation target of 2.5 per cent. for the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee; what plans he has to review that target rate; and what assessment he has made of the effect of that rate on the exchange rate. [39572]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor set out the basis of the 2½ per cent. inflation target in his remit for the Monetary Policy Committee and the Mansion House speech on 12 June 1997. He noted that the inflation target will be confirmed in each Budget. The UK's inflation rate relative to that in other countries is only one of a range of factors that influence the exchange rate.

Bank of England Act

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes that the Bank of England Act 1998 should come into force. [40074]

Mr. Darling: An order has been made today bringing into force all the provisions of the Act on 1 June 1998.

Historic Registration Records

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that registration records over 75 years old are made easily and cheaply available by means of microfilmed copies. [39648]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Oliver Letwin, dated 24 April 1998:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary question on registration records.

The Registration Acts are quite specific as to the means of access to all the records of births, deaths and marriages. The Acts allow members of the public to search the indexes in order to identify the entries they are looking for and to obtain certified copies (certificates) on payment of the appropriate statutory fees. The Registrar General has no powers to make available or disclose registration information in any other way.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Weapons

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the perceived sources by country of origin and method of procurement of weapons thought to have been used by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries in each fatal and non-fatal shooting incident forensically investigated by the security forces since 1982. [37808]

Mr. Ingram: The information sought is not available and to obtain it would incur disproportionate cost.

Homophobic Crime

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the number of homophobic incidents recorded by the RUC in each of the last five years; what estimate she has made of the under-reporting of homophobic crime; and what proposals she has to increase the confidence of homosexual people in reporting crimes against them to the police. [39208]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 April 1998]:* The statistical information requested is not currently available. The crime-recording database maintained by the RUC is based on Home Office "counting rules". It is not programmable to elicit the requested information.

The RUC is engaged in discussion with representative groupings throughout Northern Ireland to foster better relationships and encourage the homosexual community to report offending against them on the understanding that such reports will be investigated in the impartial and professional manner in which the RUC investigates all reported offending.

The RUC is also currently reviewing policy in this area to take account of recent Association of Chief Police Officers' Guidelines (December 1997) for dealing with incidents involving the gay and lesbian community.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list by category of offence, the type of offences reported or recorded as homophobic crime. [39215]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 April 1998]:* The information requested is not currently available. The crime-recording database maintained by the RUC is based upon Home Office "counting rules". It is not programmable to elicit the requested information.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decision has been taken about Sir Herman Ouseley's continuation as Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. [40005]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am very glad to announce that Sir Herman has agreed to continue in his present position and that I have re-appointed him for a further term of office up to 18 April 2002.

Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* legal practitioners and *(b)* victims have taken part in the inter-departmental review of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses announced on 13 June 1997. [39382]

Mr. Michael: The working group on vulnerable or intimidated witnesses included a representative from Victim Support as well as representatives from the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers. The working group received about fifty written contributions from a wide range of organisations and individuals, including the Law Society, the Criminal Bar Association and organisations representing victims. Two special conferences were held towards the end of last year to test out some of the ideas being considered by the working group. These were attended by individuals concerned with these important issues including members of the judiciary and the legal profession and non-governmental organisations representing victims. The working group found this to be an extremely valuable exercise which greatly assisted their work.

Police Officers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in each police force, on 31 March; if he will list the change in numbers in each force and in total from *(a)* 30 September 1997 and *(b)* 31 March 1997; and if he will make a statement. [39477]

Mr. Michael: Information on police numbers at 31 March 1998 is not yet available. The table sets out police numbers in each force at 31 March and 30 September 1997 along with the change during that period.

Ministers have no direct control over police numbers. Under legislation passed by the previous Government in 1994, it is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in their force area, within the resources available to them.

Police strength for ordinary duty

Police force	*Total ranks as at 30 September 1997*[1]	*Total ranks as at 31 March 1997*[1]	*Change in numbers*
Avon and Somerset	2,973	2,989	−16
Bedfordshire	1,081	1,094	−13
Cambridgeshire	1,292	1,302	−10
Cheshire	2,029	2,046	−16
City of London	836	859	−23
Cleveland	1,481	1,459	21
Cumbria	1,162	1,144	19
Derbyshire	1,757	1,791	−34
Devon and Cornwall	2,910	2,865	46
Dorset	1,279	1,284	−5
Durham	1,479	1,461	18
Dyfed Powys	1,008	1,005	4
Essex	2,944	2,961	−16
Gloucestershire	1,107	1,133	−25
Greater Manchester	6,908	6,922	−14
Gwent	1,229	1,243	−14
Hampshire	3,481	3,452	29
Hertfordshire	1,738	1,759	−21
Humberside	2,030	2,045	−15
Kent	3,301	3,260	41
Lancashire	3,281	3,247	33
Leicestershire	1,958	1,949	9
Lincolnshire	1,189	1,196	−8
Merseyside	4,223	4,230	−8
Metropolitan Police	26,391	26,677	−286
Norfolk	1,440	1,432	8
Northamptonshire	1,181	1,177	4
Northumbria	3,689	3,677	12
North Wales	1,371	1,369	2
North Yorkshire	1,383	1,338	45
Nottinghamshire	2,317	2,323	−6
South Wales	2,990	2,976	14
South Yorkshire	3,158	3,159	−1
Staffordshire	2,230	2,211	19
Suffolk	1,198	1,180	18
Surrey	1,608	1,620	−12
Sussex	3,040	3,085	−45
Thames Valley	3,705	3,695	10
Warwickshire	914	926	−12
West Mercia	2,031	2,040	−9
West Midlands	7,079	7,113	−34
West Yorkshire	5,250	5,209	41
Wiltshire	1,167	1,154	12
Total all forces	124,815	125,051	−236

[1] Figures relate to full time equivalents and are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Sex Offenders Register

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many entries on the Sex Offenders Register have been found to be inaccurate. [39645]

Mr. Michael: Ensuring that the data on the Register are accurate and up-to-date is a key concern of the police both at national and local level. Police forces have in place local arrangements for validating and auditing the data on a regular basis. This includes checking the whereabouts of convicted paedophiles to ensure that they are correctly registered. A number of national checks of data have also been run to identify any anomalies (such as registrations from those not required to register under the Act) which are then referred back to local forces for action.

Statistics about the accuracy of the Register in general terms are not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Solihull will receive a reply to his letter to him dated 10 February and his further letter on the same subject dated 15 April. [39583]

Mr. Michael: I wrote to the hon. Member on 7 April in response to his letter to me of 10 February. We have not yet received a letter dated 15 April from the hon. Member but will reply to any additional points raised in it as soon as possible after receipt.

Drug-related Offences

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of prisoners currently serving sentences for drug-related offences in *(a)* HMP Risley and *(b)* the North-West Region. [39368]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 1998]:* Provisional information shows that there were 130 persons sentenced for drug offences in Her Majesty's Prison Risley on 31 March 1998. This compares with 1,520 persons in the North West region (including those in Her Majesty's Prison Risley) which includes the Prison Service Areas of Mersey, Manchester and the North West.

Probation Service

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy in relation to the local provision of probation services. [39500]

Ms Quin: We see it as important that the probation service should operate effectively at local level, which includes co-operating effectively on crime reduction and community safety strategies with local authorities and other agencies. What this means in terms of the future organisation, structure and funding of the service is a question which we have been addressing as part of the prisons/probation review, on which we shall be publishing a consultation document.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department has issued on the size of population centre in respect of which individual probation offices should be maintained. [39501]

Ms Quin: None.

Magistrates Court Warrants

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many warrants issued by magistrates courts for breach of a probation, community service or combination order are currently outstanding; what was the average period taken by the police to enforce such a warrant in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [38659]

Ms Quin: I regret that this information is not available centrally.

Young Offender Institutions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the budgets given to the governors of each young offender institution in *(a)* London and *(b)* the South East for each of the last five years for which figures are available. [39298]

Ms Quin: The information is given in the table.

Annual budget allocation

£

Establishment	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*
Feltham	16,042,210	16,165,897	15,595,945	15,536,387	16,089,614
Dover	5,517,990	5,507,813	5,623,501	5,663,100	5,723,758
Rochester	7,821,366	7,943,709	8,024,739	7,857,789	7,601,974
East Sutton Park	1,691,063	1,680,767	1,705,875	1,680,606	1,751,577
Chelmsford	8,554,320	8,553,137	8,938,337	8,408,845	8,294,729
Bullwood Hall	3,659,040	3,881,069	3,722,832	3,711,636	3,721,190
Reading	5,247,400	4,956,465	5,055,179	5,237,792	5,400,991

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15 and 16 year old young offenders were on remand in Feltham Young Offenders Institution for *(a)* two to three months, *(b)* three to six months and *(c)* over six months prior to conviction or acquittal during each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many currently on remand have spent more than three months awaiting conviction or acquittal. [39300]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the tables.

Table 1

Population of untried prisoners aged 15 and 16 years in Feltham Young Offender Institution by length of time since first reception[1] 1995–1997

Date	*Length of time since first reception into a Prison Service establishment*		
	2–3 months	*3–6 months*	*over 6 months*
31 March 1995	4	3	—
31 March 1996	7	5	2
31 March 1997	9	5	2

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

Table 2

Population of untried prisoners aged 15 and 16 years in Feltham Young Offender Institution by length of time since first reception[1] on 31 March 1998

Date	*Length of time since first reception into a Prison Service establishment*
	Over 3 months
31 March 1998	11

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time young offenders spend on remand in young offenders units prior to conviction or acquittal. [39299]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table.

Estimated average time spent in custody for untried young offenders in 1997

Type of Custody	*Average number of days in custody*
Untried	[1]40

[1] Time spent in Prison Service establishments before conviction, acquittal etc.

Asylum (Spending Review)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the terms of reference of the spending review relating to the asylum process. [39389]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A copy of the terms of reference for the inter-departmental study of the asylum process has now been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he will take to bring the London Underground East London line into use for rail passenger services; and if he will make a statement. [39677]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport officially re-opened the East London Line on 24 March.

Great Western Trains

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the latest punctuality figures for Great Western Trains in terms of the percentage of passengers whose trains arrive on time. [39699]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Latest punctuality figures for Great Western Trains will be published in the Franchising Director's next network performance bulletin in May. Punctuality figures for the year up to 7 December 1997 were published in the bulletin dated 15 January 1998, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Punctuality data are collected in terms of the percentage of scheduled services which arrive on time (within 9 minutes 59 seconds of the scheduled journey time), Monday-Saturday, not the percentage of passengers whose trains arrive on time.

Rents

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the average level of rent paid by local authority tenants in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* England in each year since 1989. [39339]

Mr. Raynsford: The average weekly rents for local authority tenants for the financial years since 1989–90 are as follows:

£

	England[1]	*Greater London*[1]
1989–90	20.86	24.65
1990–91	23.92	29.10
1991–92	27.59	36.76
1992–93	30.84	41.77
1993–94	33.70	45.72
1994–95	35.79	47.05
1995–96	38.41	50.76
1996–97	40.17	53.11
1997–98	41.18	54.20

[1] Provisional

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the average level of rent paid by tenants of housing associations and other registered social landlords in *(a)* England and *(b)* Greater London in each year since 1989. [39340]

Mr. Raynsford: Rents covering the whole Registered Social Landlords/housing associations stock have been collected by the Housing Corporation since 1992. The average weekly rents for England and Greater London are as follows:

£

	at 31 March	
	England	*Greater London*
1992	29.62	32.97
1993	34.34	39.90
1994	38.17	42.74
1995	40.71	46.25
1996	44.00	50.28
1997	46.74	53.12

Source:

Housing corporation HAR10/1 return

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the average level of rent paid by tenants of private landlords in *(a)* England and *(b)* Greater London in each year since 1989. [39338]

Mr. Raynsford: The figures shown in the table are from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) for years up to 1992 and from the Survey of English Housing (SEH), which has a larger sample, from 1993–94. The FES was run on a calendar year basis up to 1992, while the SEH has been on a financial year basis since it started in April 1993.

Average rents of tenants of private landlords, 1989 to 1996–97

£ a week

	England	*Greater London*
1989	31	45
1990	43	55
1991	51	77
1992	55	76
1993–94	65	97
1994–95	68	99
1995–96	74	105
1996–97	81	125

Notes:

1. The averages exclude rent-free lettings.

2. Rents include water rates and services if included with the rental payment.

3. Like all estimates from sample surveys, these figures are subject to sampling variability. The figures for Greater London are subject to greater sampling variability than those for England as a whole because of the smaller sample size. Individual year-to-year movements shown by the estimates, both for Greater London and for England, are liable to reflect variations in the sample as well as real changes, but the broad indication of long term trends will still be valid.

4. A comparison between the SEH and the FES does not indicate any systematic differences in average private rents due to differences in survey method.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to undertake consultation on matters relating to the private rented sector, with particular reference to houses in multiple occupation. [39337]

Mr. Raynsford: We are committed to introducing a national licensing system for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) where the worst housing conditions in the private rented sector tend to be found. We expect to consult on proposals later this year. I cannot say at this stage when we will have the opportunity to legislate. In the shorter term we propose to introduce a Code of Practice under existing powers covering fire safety and other amenity standards in HMOs. We expect to issue a consultation paper during the summer.

Structure Plans (Transport)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the applicability and enforcement of county structure plans in respect of transport policies in circumstances where they conflict with proposals within the forthcoming Government White Paper. [39585]

Mr. Raynsford: Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires all decisions on planning matters to be made in accordance with the adopted development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where plan policies are superseded by new planning policy guidance issued by the Secretary of State, local authorities must have regard to the new guidance when taking planning decisions. They will also take account of the revised guidance when updating their development plans. The Secretary of State will have regard to any more recent guidance in determining called-in planning applications on appeals.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ex Gratia Payments

Mr. Wills: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the statutory provisions governing ex gratia payment in cases involving employment agencies. [39426]

Mr. Ian McCartney: There are no statutory provisions specifically ex gratia payments in cases involving employment agencies.

Contaminated Land

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on funding for research and development into remediation technologies applicable to contaminated land. [39353]

Mr. Battle: There are a range of schemes to encourage R&D applicable to contaminated land remediation. The main ones are listed below.

The Foresight programme brings together Government, industry and researchers to define a common agenda.

The five year Link Biological Treatment of Soil & Water Programme provided £4.6m of Government funding; although it is now closed to new projects dissemination is ongoing.

The Water Biotreatment Club is a forum established with DTI funding for those involved in environmental biotechnology research and development.

The Biotechnology Means Business (BMB) Initiative is a package of measures aimed at increasing awareness of the opportunities biotechnology presents and encouraging implementation of biotechnology within industry.

URGENT is a £9.7m programme of urban environmental research launched in February of this year, which will include research into the costs involved in recovering and developing contaminated land.

CONSEPT will be a series of land remediation technology projects—some to be underway by the Autumn. The Steering group is chaired by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It aims to take forward remediation technologies from the scientists' bench to workable, marketable solutions by getting research bodies and industry together to establish test sites. The budget is c.£10k per year for approximately 3 years.

The SMART scheme provides grants to assist with technical and commercial feasibility studies into innovative technology and to develop, up to pre-production prototype, new products or processes which demonstrate significant advances on existing technology.

Finally there is the Environmental Technology Best Practice Programme: contaminated land remediation is not a priority area at present but could be considered if industry put forward a case.

Postal Charges

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received on the recent increase in the level of postal charges to Europe above that for inland post; and if she will make a statement. [39483]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Post Office consulted the Government and the Post Office Users National Council (POUNC) about the proposed increase, who have accepted the need for it. Handling costs have risen and the Post Office was not fully covering its costs. It is still one of the cheapest rates in Europe.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what comment she has made of the effect on British industry of substituting the 20 per cent. reduction in the

greenhouse gases specified in the Kyoto Protocol for the Government's target for the 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide. [38955]

Mr. Battle: The Government plan to publish a consultation document in the summer on a new Climate Change Programme. This will focus on policy options for meeting our legally binding target from Kyoto, but also look at measures that would move beyond that towards our aim of a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions. We are inviting views from all sectors throughout this consultation process.

Post Office Counters

Mr. Green: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to restructure Post Office Counters Ltd., with particular reference to plans to allow the separation of the Logistics Business Unit from POCL. [39456]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Decisions relating to the day-to-day running of the postal businesses, such as the internal structure and organisation of constituent business units, are the responsibility of the Post Office Board and management.

Omani British Offset Programme

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Omani British Offset Programme was agreed; and if he will list specific defence sales agreements which it contains. [39243]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her on 21 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *557*. While specific details of individual offset projects remain, at present, confidential between the Governments of the UK and Oman, the main areas involved are the civil aviation, finance, pharmaceuticals and construction industries, as well as sport and education related projects.

WALES

National Curriculum

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the review on the National Curriculum in Wales to report. [38817]

Mr. Hain: The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACCAC) are due to report on the review of the National Curriculum in June. The report will deal with proposals for the year 2000. Additionally, I have now received the Authority's advice on how best to reduce overload in the primary school curriculum. I wrote to all schools to announce my response to this on 23 April.

Literacy

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the level of literacy rates within each county and county borough in Wales. [38603]

Mr. Hain: In July 1997 The Basic Skills Agency published the results of a 1995 survey of people aged 16 to 64 which showed the following (see table) levels of reading skills in the old county council areas.

The available information for school pupils relates to performance in National Curriculum Tests in English and Welsh at age 7, 11 and 14. The latest information was contained in the National Curriculum results booklets published last November. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

The White Paper "Building Excellent Schools Together" set out our proposals for improving standards of literacy so that by the year 2000 between 60 and 70 per cent. of our 11 and 14 year olds should attain the expected levels in the core subjects including English and Welsh; and by the year 2002 this should be raised to between 70 and 80 per cent.

percentage

	Good reading skills	*Average reading skills*	*Very low*[1] *and low*[2]
Clwyd	[3]58	30	13
Dyfed	57	26	17
Gwent	35	45	21
Gwynedd	47	39	14
Mid Glamorgan	48	35	17
Powys	49	40	11
South Glamorgan	51	36	13
West Glamorgan	65	23	12

[1] Serious difficulties with reading.

[2] Relatively poor reading skills.

[3] Figures do not always add up to 100 per cent. because of rounding.

Tourism Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on prospects for the tourism industry. [39431]

Mr. Hain: Tourism in Wales has enjoyed particular success in recent years and prospects look good for the future.

It is estimated that in 1997 spend by tourists in Wales will total £1.9 billion including £234 million from overseas tourists.

The European summit in June and the Rugby World Cup in 1999 provide further opportunities to raise the profile of Wales world-wide. The Wales Tourist Board in collaboration with other agencies and the Tourism Industry itself is working to ensure that Wales derives maximum benefit from these events.

Deaf and Autistic Children

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance his Department provides for deaf and autistic children; and if he will make a statement. [39436]

Mr. Hain: Local education authorities and schools are responsible for identifying and making appropriate provision for children with special educational needs (SEN), including children with sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties associated with autism. In making appropriate provision, schools and LEAs are required to have regard to the guidance contained in the 'Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN', a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The Department is undertaking a comprehensive review of SEN policy, practice and guidance in the light of responses to the recent Green Paper on SEN 'The BEST for Special Education' (Cm 3792). The Green Paper places greater emphasis on earlier identification and more appropriate intervention and highlights the importance of stronger regional planning in the provision of effective SEN support, particularly in relation to children with low incidence disabilities such as sensory impairment and autism.

SEN provision in schools in Wales will benefit from the additional £50 million revenue funding being provided for schools this year, and the additional capital funding being provided for school buildings over the lifetime of this Parliament.

The Department also makes some £1.3 million available each year under the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) programme to support the effective implementation of the Code of Practice and for SEN teacher training. The training of teachers of pupils with sensory disabilities and autistic children are specific priorities under the GEST programme.

In addition to grant aiding a number of voluntary SEN/disability support organisations, the Department has made £500,000 available to local authorities in Wales for the period 1996–97 to 1997–98 under the Schools Access Initiative. This initiative is designed to improve access to schools and the curriculum for pupils with physical and sensory disabilities.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *440*, and 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *399*, if he will make a statement on the compatibility of the figures quoted for the cost of the void office space to be covered by the accumulated figures for the reserves of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority with the figures quoted for the actual reserves accumulated in the last five years. [39692]

Mr. Ron Davies: The level of reserves at each financial year end varies depending on several factors including provisions for void space, capital cash flow and supplies stock levels.

DEFENCE

Meteorological Office

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Meteorological Office for 1998–99. [40004]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office is responsible for providing meteorological services and weather forecasts for a wide range of customers, including the Armed Forces, government, civil aviation, shipping, emergency services, media, commerce, industry and the public. It also undertakes research related to meteorology and climate. During 1998–99 the Meteorological Office will be set the following challenging targets:

Key Target 1

To achieve a value of at least 111.1 index points on 31 March 1999 from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1995, for the global Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) index, which measures the overall forecasting skill of the global NWP model;

Key Target 2

To achieve an index level of 104.0 by 31 March 2000 from a baseline of 100.0 at 31 March 1997, and to achieve an increase of at least 2.0 index points during 1998–99 for the UK NWP partial index, which measures the forecasting skill of the NWP model for the UK;

Key Target 3

To increase the index of service quality to at least 104.8 on 31 March 1999 from a baseline of 100.0 for 1996–97, in line with agreed customer requirements. The index covers representative services and products across defence, civil aviation, public and business users;

Key Target 4

To improve efficiency from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1997 to at least 108.0 on 31 March 1999 as measured by the agreed Efficiency Index;

Key Target 5

To achieve an overall return on capital employed (ROCE) of at least 7% taken year on year. For the financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99 to achieve an overall ROCE of at least 11.6% averaged over the two years;

Key Target 6

To make a contribution from commercial activities in 1998–99 of not less than £1.1 million, on the agreed basis of measurement.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the programme officers and the requirements officers of the 1980 Memorandum of Understanding on chemical and biological defence between Britain, the United States of America and Canada have met since 1 January 1995; and where these meetings were held. [38611]

Mr. Spellar: The dates and locations of the meetings of the Programme Officers and Requirement Offices of the 1980 MOU and CBD since 1 January 1995 are as follows:

Date	*Location*
6–7 March 1995	US Army Chemical School, Fort McClellan, AL, USA
19–20 September 1995	CBD Porton Down, UK
19–20 March 1996	Defence Research Establishment Suffield, Medicine Hat, Canada
17–18 September 1996	US Naval Coastal Systems Station, Florida, USA
13–14 March 1997	CBD Porton Down, UK
16–17 September 1997	Defence Research Establishment Suffield, Medicine Hat, Canada
10–11 March 1998	Natick Research, Development and Engineering Centre, Natick, USA

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the reductions in total spending at DERA in Shoeburyness in consequence of the transfer of work to Eskmeals; and what will be the additional costs involved in carrying out this work at Eskmeals. [36388]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 26 March 1998]:* There is currently significant overcapacity on the DERA test and evaluation land ranges. The proposals made by DERA to match the capacity of the ranges to the needs of the Ministry of Defence involve concentrating work at the Eskmeals range, thereby using capacity at that site, with the range at Shoeburyness and Pendine operating only as required. The environmental test centre and the demilitarisation facilities at Shoeburyness would remain fully operational. The cost of operating the Eskmeals and Shoeburyness sites in this way is assessed as about £15.8 million per year; were the Eskmeals site to be closed and all of the work concentrated at Shoeburyness, the annual cost would be £16.8 million. Currently, the two sites cost some £23.9 million to operate each year.

Sewn and Knitted Products

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of spending on sewn and knitted products for service personnel is purchased from *(a)* UK-based companies, *(b)* EU-based companies and *(c)* non-EU-based companies. [36818]

Mr. Spellar: The bulk of procurement of sewn and knitted products for service personnel is carried out through the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. J. Deas to Mr. Andrew George, dated 24 April 1998:

In the unavoidable absence of my Chief Executive I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the proportion of spending on sewn and knitted products for service personnel purchased within UK-based, EU-based and non-EU-based companies, as this matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Defence Clothing & Textiles Agency.

This information is not readily available and would involve a disproportionate cost to identify a precise answer, as we would have to go through each individual contract manually. However, a quick analysis of contracts placed in financial year 1997/98 would indicate the following proportions: in UK 80%, elsewhere in EU 15% and non-EU 5%.

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the gross value of textile and knitwear contracts placed with Remploy was in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1997–98. [36820]

Mr. Spellar: The bulk of the MOD contracts placed with Remploy for procurement of textile and knitted products are carried out through the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member. In addition there may be some local purchase of items from Remploy for which we do not hold records centrally and which could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Mr. J. Deas to Mr. Andrew George, dated 24 April 1998:

In the unavoidable absence of my Chief Executive I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the gross value of textile and knitwear contracts placed with Remploy in 1993–94 and 1997–98, as this matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA).

Our records show contracts to the value of £18.8M in 1993–94 and £3.0M in 1997–98, VAT inclusive, placed with Remploy by the DCTA. These figures include all items procured by the DCTA, as the tri-Service Agency responsible for the majority of the clothing and textile items purchased by the MOD. However, we are not responsible for certain clothing and textile items, such as Aircrew clothing, for which we are informed that contracts were placed with Remploy to a value of £51,865 in 1993–94 and £439,105 in 1997–98.

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent in each of the last five years on the purchase of sewn and knitted products for service personnel. [36816]

Mr. Spellar: The bulk of the procurement of sewn and knitted products for service personnel is carried out through the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member. In addition there is some expenditure by individual MOD budget areas on local purchase of clothing services, which includes non-centrally supplied items, footwear repair and supply of cleaning cloths. Records on the procurement of these items are not held centrally and to identify expenditure on them would involve disproportionate cost.

Letter from Mr. J. Deas to Mr. Andrew George, dated 24 April 1998:

In the unavoidable absence of my Chief Executive I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about how much his Department has spent in each of the last 5 years on the purchase of sewn and knitted products for service personnel, as this matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Defence Clothing & Textiles Agency (DCTA).

The DCTA is a tri-Service organisation, formed in 1994, that procures clothing and textile items, which would mostly all fit into this category in one way or another, e.g. from shirts, trousers and jackets through to tentage and load carriage equipment. It may be that some items such as Aircrew clothing, procured outside of this Agency, would also fall within this category. The DCTA also procures General Stores and Defence Accommodation Stores.

In light of the above I wish to inform you of the nett sums, VAT inclusive, that this Agency has spent on all clothing and textile requirements since its inception (including the forecast final expenditure for the financial year just completed), as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	[1]111
1996–97	111
1995–96	81
1994–95	101

[1] Estimate as the exact figure is not yet known

PRIME MINISTER

Quangos

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *68–69*, when the Government review on quangos will be completed. [38815]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster published a consultation paper on 11 November reaffirming the Government's commitment to keep the number of quangos to a minimum and setting out proposals for making those which remain more open, accountable and effective. We are currently evaluating the 400 or so responses to the consultation paper, which we have received from a wide range of individuals and organisations, and propose to publish the results of the consultation when it is completed later this year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bone-in Beef

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the legality and enforcement issues raised by the outcome of the case known as Procurator Fiscal *v.* Sutherland. [39661]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Sheriff in Selkirk in the case of the Procurator Fiscal *v.* Sutherland held that Regulation 3(2) of the Beef Bone Regulations is defective. This judgment, which was based on legal argument and not food safety issues, is not binding on any other UK Courts, including those in Scotland. The Procurator Fiscal was granted leave to appeal and has now done so. The Regulations thus remain in force and the controls on the sale, use and disposal of beef bones, including those in respect of bone-in beef, continue to be valid and will remain so unless the judgment is confirmed on appeal.

The requirements of these Regulations are essential for the protection of public health and the Government expect them to continue to be observed and enforced throughout the country. Advice has been issued to all food law enforcement authorities to make this clear—copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

In addition, the terms of the judgment should not affect the normal refrigeration of meat which should continue to be transported, stored and sold at the appropriate temperature.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to compensate restaurateurs for loss of trade regarding sales of beef on the bone following the outcome of Procurator Fiscal *v.* Sutherland. [39662]

Dr. John Cunningham: None. There could be no justification for compensation, and we have in any case received no such claims.

Organophosphates

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those organophosphate-based treatments currently licensed by his Department, indicating in each case what they are licensed for and which licences have been revoked in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39330]

Mr. Rooker: Organophosphorus-based sheep dips currently authorised are:

Diazinon-based:

Coopers All Seasons Fly and Scab Dip

Diazadip All Seasons Sheep Dip

Osmonds Gold Fleece Sheep Dip

Paracide Plus

Top Clip Fly and Scab Dip

Propetamphos-based

Flyte 1250/Seraphos Scab Approved

Ectomort Centenary

Some of these dips may be marketed under alternative names. Details are given in the list of all sheep ectoparasiticides, which is published every six months and a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Other OP-based veterinary medicines are:

OP-based veterinary medicines

Species	*Product*	*Active substance*
Salmon	Aquaguard Sea Lice Treatment	Dichlorvos
Dogs	Baccara Insecticidal Collar for Small Dogs	Diazinon
Cats	Beaphar Flea Collar for Cats	Diazinon
Dogs	Beaphar Flea and Tick Collar for Dogs	Diazinon
Cats	Beaphar 3 Month Flea Collar for Cats	Diazinon
Dogs	Beaphar 3 Month Flea and Tick Collar for Dogs	Diazinon
Cats	Catovel Pretty Care Elast. Insect. Collar for Cats	Diazinon
Dogs	Cyflee Tablets 30mg	Cythioate
Cats	Cyflee Tablets 7.5mg for Cats	Cythioate
Dogs	Cyflee Tablets 30mg for Dogs	Cythioate
Dogs	Cyflee Tablets 7.5mg for Small Dogs	Cythioate
Cats	Hartz Rid Flea Long Life Collar for Cats	Tetrachlorvinphos
Dogs	Hartz Rid Flea Long Life Collar for Dogs	Tetrachlorvinphos
Dogs	Hartz Rid Flea Collar for Dogs	Tetrachlorvinphos
Cats	Hartz Rid Flea Collar for Cats	Tetrachlorvinphos
Cats	Hartz Rid Flea Powder for Cats	Tetrachlorvinphos
Dogs	Hartz Rid Flea Powder for Dogs	Tetrachlorvinphos
Cats	Nuvan Top	Dichlorvos
Dogs	Otello Insecticidal Collar for Dogs	Diazinon
Cats	Otello Insecticidal Collar for Cats	Diazinon
Pigs	Porect	Phosmet
Cattle	Poron 20	Phosmet

OP-based veterinary medicines

Species	*Product*	*Active substance*
Cats	Prevender Cat	Diazinon
Cats	Preventef Insecticidal Collar for Cats and Dogs	Diazinon
Dogs	Protection 300 Insecticidal Collar	Diazinon
Salmon	Salmosan	Azamethipos
Dogs	Sergeant's Flea Collar For Large Dogs	Naled
Dogs	Sergeant's Flea Collar for Dogs	Naled
Cats	Sergeant's Flea Collar for Cats	Naled
Dogs	Tiguvon 20	Fenthion
Cats	Tiguvon 10	Fenthion
Dogs	Vet-Kem Sponge-On for Dogs	Phosmet
Pigs	Verdipor C	Dichlorvos
Horses	Verdisol	Dichlorvos

No marketing authorisations for OP-based veterinary medicines have been revoked during the past 5 years. Products may from time to time be withdrawn from the market but this is a matter for the authorisation holders.

A list of organophosphate-based pesticide products currently approved by MAFF for use in the UK has been placed in the Library.

Pesticide products may have their approvals revoked for a number of reasons. These include the commercial withdrawal of products from the market by the approval holder or approval holders not meeting data submission deadlines set by Ministers to support the continued approval of their products. A list of the MAFF-approved organophosphate-based pesticide products that have been revoked since 1 April 1993 has been placed in the Library.

Broiler Chickens

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will implement the recommendations made by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1992 for a legislative requirement for a twice-daily inspection of flocks of broiler chickens; and if he will make a statement. [37779]

Mr. Morley: We intend to implement the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommendation for twice daily inspection in the new welfare code for broiler chickens which is currently in preparation. Changes to the current legislative requirement for inspection at least once a day are, in our view, best pursued at EU level. The effectiveness of the new code will be kept under review.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will implement the recommendation made by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1992 that stocking densities for broiler chickens should be controlled by regulations; and if he will make a statement. [37774]

Mr. Morley: The new welfare code for broiler chickens which is currently in preparation will repeat and reinforce the current recommendation for a maximum stocking density of 34 kg per sq metre. Implementation of a statutory limit is, in our view, best pursued at EU level. The effectiveness of the new welfare code will be kept under review.

SCOTLAND

Cairn Gorm Funicular Railway

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *292*, and the subsequent letter from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, (1) if Highland and Islands Enterprise's appraisal of the proposed funicular railway on Cairn Gorm assessed the likely increase in *(a)* the number of tourist days and *(b)* visitor expenditure; [38597]

(2) what was the projected impact on the winter and summer businesses of *(a)* Aonoch Mar, *(b)* the Lecht and *(c)* Glen Shee, identified in the economic appraisal of the proposed funicular railway in Cairn Gorm. [38595]

Mr. Wilson: These are operational matters for Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I will ask the Chairman of that organisation to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *292*, and the subsequent letter from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, if he took into account the contents of HIE's economic appraisal in approving the expenditure by HIE on a funicular railway on Cairn Gorm; and what independent assessment of this appraisal his Department sought. [38596]

Mr. Wilson: The economic appraisal of the proposed funicular railway project was one of the factors which my right hon. Friend and I took into account in deciding to approve the financial contribution of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to the project.

My right hon. Friend and I do not usually seek an independent assessment of the economic appraisals carried out by or for Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Professional advice on the contents of such appraisals is available from Departmental officials.

Dounreay

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has received from SEPA in respect of their recent assessment of the total radioactive inventory put into *(a)* the access shaft and *(b)* the storage silo at Dounreay. [38884]

Mr. Macdonald: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) has recently revised its assessment of the total inventory of radioactive material disposed of to the shaft. I understand that this report has not yet been issued to SEPA but it is expected in the near future. With regard to the silo, the regulatory responsibility rests with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). An inventory of the contents of the silo does exist and is currently the subject of refinement by the UKAEA.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Saudi Arabia in connection with their detention of Sarah Jane Dematera. [39352]

Mr. Fatchett: Our Embassy in Riyadh has requested information about the case of Ms Dematera from the Saudi government. We await a response.

The Embassy is also in touch with the Philippines Embassy in order to monitor developments.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the arrangements made for the importation of radioactive nuclear material from Georgia; what plans have been made for reprocessing this material; what steps are being taken to safeguard the public during transportation and reprocessing; and if he will make a statement. [39586]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I would refer my hon. Friend to the oral statement I made on 22 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns 821–27.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Georgian highly-enriched uranium has arrived in the UK. [40073]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Georgian uranium arrived in the UK on US military aircraft in the early hours of this morning. It has now arrived safely at Dounreay where it is being handled by the UK Atomic Energy Authority.

In line with the oral statement I made on 22 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns 821–27, further information on the decision to take the Georgian uranium will be provided to the House within the next week.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 12 January, 13 February and 18 March from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss G. Shabeen, 26 Tagove Close. [39478]

Mr. Fatchett: Inquiries into the facts of this case have been completed and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will write to my right hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Human Rights

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement identifying which articles of which international human rights agreements to which the UK is a signatory are breached by countries where adults and children are used as bonded labour. [39356]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We regard bonded labour as an intolerable form of labour akin to slavery, forced labour and compulsory labour. The international human rights instruments to which the United Kingdom is a party and which specifically prohibit or require the suppression of slavery, forced and compulsory labour are as follows:

(a) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 8 of the Covenant states that no one shall be held in slavery; that slavery and the slave trade in all their forms shall be prohibited; that no one shall be held in servitude; and that no one shall be forced to perform forced or compulsory labour;

(b) The United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. Article 1 of the Convention requires States parties to take all practicable and necessary legislative and other measures to bring about progressively and as soon as possible the complete abolition or abandonment of, among other institutions and practices, debt bondage, serfdom and any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour.

(c) The International Labour Organisation Convention (No 29) Concerning Forced Labour. Article 1 of the Convention requires each State party to suppress the use of forced labour or compulsory labour in all its forms within the shortest possible period;

(d) The International Labour Organisation Convention (No 105) Concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour. Article 1 of the Convention requires each State party to suppress and not to make use of forced or compulsory labour.

Any State which ratified these human rights instruments would be in breach of its legally binding obligations if it did not fulfil its undertakings in respect of these Articles.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the proposed new international convention banning the worst abuses of child labour to be discussed at the International Labour Organisation meeting in June; and if he will make a statement. [39676]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We strongly support the development of a new International Labour Organisation Convention to eradicate the most intolerable forms of child labour. We will be participating very actively in the discussions to draw up the new instrument and we will seek to ensure that when adopted in 1999 it will be effective in terms of the progressive elimination of all extreme forms of child labour.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which aspects of the Government's human rights policy are his Department's responsibility. [39678]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This Department has overall responsibility for the Government's international human rights commitments. It works in partnership with other departments in Whitehall including the Department for International Development, which is responsible for the rights of poor and disadvantaged peoples in poorer countries; DfEE, which has lead responsibility within Whitehall for the UK's policy within the International Labour Organisation; DTI; the Home Office; and the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Hong Kong

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the legislation recently passed by the Provisional Legislature in Hong Kong exempting Chinese state organisations from the territories' laws with Article 22 of the Basic Law; and if he will make a statement. [39680]

Mr. Fatchett: It is reasonable that the Hong Kong SAR Government should adapt references to the British Crown in Hong Kong's laws. We share the concerns expressed

in Hong Kong about the implications of the way in which this legislation has been drafted, including the extent to which Chinese state bodies will be bound by local laws.

The question of the Ordinance's compatibility with Article 22 of the Basic Law involves interpretation of Hong Kong law, and would therefore be a matter for the Hong Kong courts.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Examination Results

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list, for each education authority the number of *(a)* A to C and *(b)* A to E GSCE grades achieved per 1,000 (i) in total, (ii) normalised against an index of social deprivation across the authority catchment area and (iii) normalised against an index of achievement by pupils in the authority catchment area at the age of 11 years; [38296]

(2) if he will list for each education authority the number of A-level successes *(a)* in total, *(b)* normalised against an index of social deprivation for the education authority catchment area and *(c)* normalised against an index of achievement at age 11 years for each education authority catchment area. [38229]

Dr. Howells: Information on the GCSE and A/AS Level performance of pupils in each LEAs maintained schools as shown in the 1997 Performance Tables, copies of which I have placed in the Library.

Also shown are estimates of the attainments which LEAs would have achieved if their performance had been in line with the national pattern for authorities with a similar *(a)* proportion of maintained secondary school pupils in LEAs knows to be eligible for free school meals, and *(b)* LEA averaged achievements of maintained school pupils in the 1997 KS 2 English, Maths and Science Tests.

Progress measures between KS 3 and GCSE for schools will be published in this year's Secondary School Performance Tables.

Literacy Strategy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultations his Department initiated prior to the development of the literacy strategy; and with which bodies. [39151]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *227*, and to my answer of 22 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *660*.

Skills Task Force

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the members of the Skills Task Force indicating the criteria governing their appointment. [38869]

Dr. Howells: I am very grateful that those listed have agreed to be members of the Skills Task Force. They were chosen on the basis of their knowledge and experience and ability to bring different perspectives to the issues which will be addressed by the Task Force.

Members of the Skills Task Force:

Chris Humphries—Task Force Chairman

Chief Executive, TEC National Council. Director-General elect of the British Chamber of Commerce.

Gary Allen

Chairman of IMI Plc, past president of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, member of the CBI council.

Adair Turner

Director for the Confederation of British Industry.

Denise Hall

General Manager, Education, for BT.

Llew Avis

Personnel Director at Siemens Semiconductor manufacturing plant at Newcastle. Fellow of Institute of Personnel Directors, Chairs the BCC Task Force on Skills.

John Palmer

Chair of Steel Training Limited, recently retired as manager director of Firsteel Group of Walsall.

Peter Rainbird

Chair of Essex TEC, Deputy Chair, CITB.

Tony Dubbins

General Director of Print Workers Union.

Ken Jackson

General Secretary AEEU.

John Edmonds

General Secretary GMB.

Eddie MacIntyre

Principal of Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies.

Leslie Wagner

Leeds Metropolitan University. Leads for CVCP on employment issues.

Iain Roxburgh

CE of Town Clerk of Coventry City Council.

Anne Weinstock

Rathbone CI.

Julia Tinsley

Pitman Training Centre, Sheffield.

Rita Britton

Polyannas—Barnsley.

Sharon Studer

Vice President and General Manager, 3 COM (Remote Access).

DeAnne Julius

Bank of England.

Ashwin Mistry

Managing Director, Brett & Randall, Insurance Brokers, Board member, Leicestershire TEC, Careers Service, Ambulance Service and NHS Trust.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Opposition Parties (Benefits)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the benefits and the monetary value of benefits granted to each opposition party, including details for both Houses of Parliament and both Short Money funding and other allocations, with special reference to *(a)* salaries of the Official Opposition Leader and whips, *(b)* salaries and

costs of civil servants attached to the Official Opposition Whips' Office, *(c)* the provision of a car and driver to the Leader of the Opposition and *(d)* the supply of newspapers and other services to the Official Opposition Whips' Office for (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [38950]

Mrs. Ann Taylor:

1996–97

	£
Financial Assistance to Opposition Parties (Short Money):	
Labour	1,530,190.51
Liberal Democrats	316,480.64
SNP	36,782.68
Plaid Cymru	22,040.36
Ulster Unionist	46,357.18
Democratic Unionist	15,954.37
SDLP	23,134.12
Total	1,990,939.86

1997–98

	£
Period: 1 April 1997 to April 1997 (pre General Election)	
Labour	129,017.97
Liberal Democrats	26,677.05
SNP	3,100.65
Plaid Cymru	1,858.35
Ulster Unionist	3,908.76
Democratic Unionist	1,345.23
SDLP	1,950.53
Total	167,858.54
Period: 1 May 1997 to March 1998 (post General Election)	
Conservative	986,762.82
Liberal Democrats	371,997.98
SNP	46,167.90
Plaid Cymru	21,210.96
Ulster Unionist	47,580.34
Democratic Unionist	11,618.90
SDLP	18,553.51
Total	1,503,892.41

Note:

Because the General Election occurred one month into the 1997–98 financial year, the sums received by each party in that year are apportioned according to the state of the parties before and after the election.

1998–99

	£
(a) Salaries of the Official Opposition Leader and Whips:	
1996–97 House of Commons	
Leader of the Opposition	39,876
Opposition Chief Whip	31,125
Opposition Assistant Whip(2)	40,058
1996–97 House of Lords	
Opposition Leader	43,235
Opposition Chief Whip	39,104
Total	193,398
1997–98 House of Commons (pre General Election)	
Leader of the Opposition	867
Opposition Chief Whip	669
Opposition Assistant Whip(2)	861

1998–99

	£
1997–98 House of Commons (post General Election)	
Leader of the Opposition	50,121
Opposition Chief Whip	28,364
Opposition Deputy Chief Whip	18,252
Opposition Assistant Whip(1)	18,252
1997–98 House of Lords (pre General Election)	
Opposition Leader	938
Opposition Chief Whip	849
1997–98 House of Lords (post General Election)	
Opposition Leader	39,761
Opposition Chief Whip	35,961
Total	194,895
1998–99 House of Commons	
Leader of the Opposition	56,513
Opposition Chief Whip	31,981
Opposition Deputy Chief Whip	20,580
Opposition Assistant Whip(1)	20,580
1998–99 House of Lords	
Opposition Leader	44,832
Opposition Chief Whip	40,547
Total	215,033
(b) Salaries and costs of civil servants attached to the Official Opposition Whips' office	
1996–97 House of Commons	
Staff costs (1 EO and 3 AOs)	111,314
Postal Services	31,957
1996–97 House of Lords	
Postal Services	17,095
Total	160,366
1997–98 House of Commons	
Staff Costs (1 EO and 3 AOs)	103,434
Postal Services	23,139
Other GAE	713
1997–98 House of Lords	
Postal Services	34,719
Total	162,005
1998–99 House of Commons[1]	
Staff Costs (1 EO and 3 AOs)	111,500
Postal Services	19,000
Other GAE	1,500
1998–99 House of Lords[1]	
Postal Services	35,587
Total	167,587
(c) Provision of car and driver to Leader of the Opposition:	
1996–97	58,130
1997–98	67,802
1998–99[1]	69,497

(d) The House authorities supply the Office with 3 copies of each of 11 daily newspapers for each day the House is sitting. An exact figure for the total cost is not readily available.

[1] Estimated

Note:

The appropriate percentage, i.e. the increase in Retail Prices Index March to March, was not available to uprate the formula for calculating the allocation of Short Money for this year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which Minister took the final decision to proceed with the advertising campaign for the winter fuel payments. [39716]

Mr. Denham: The advertising campaign for Winter Fuel Payments was approved by Ministers in the normal way. We were determined that pensioners should not be fearful of turning up their heating if a cold spell occurred. We also considered it important that pensioners knew as quickly as possible how much they would receive, as well as how and when it would be paid.

We explored the simplest and most cost-effective ways to let them know that a payment would be made. A publicity strategy was developed, which took account of views expressed by three of the pensioner welfare organisations, on the most effective ways to get the necessary information to as many of the eligible pensioners as possible. We found that a multi-media package, costing an estimated £1.7 million, was likely to reach and inform around 80 per cent. of the ten million eligible pensioners. In approving the package, I considered the cost reasonable, given that this was an unprecedented exercise providing help to over seven million pensioner households, at a total cost of £400 million over two years.

Following the announcement of the detail of the scheme in January, a campaign was swiftly launched in conjunction with Help the Aged, Age Concern and the National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaux. It included advertisements in the press and on television, leaflets, posters and a dedicated telephone Helpline. The publicity ran for three months and enabled pensioners to turn up their heating, confident that a payment would be made. The Helpline is still available.

Crisis Loans

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications were made for crisis loans in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; how many have been made to date in 1998 and what proportion of the applications have been successful in each year. [39715]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

As discretionary Social Fund annual allocations are made for the period 1 April to 31 March, the statistics on crisis loans are presented in the same way.

Applications and awards of crisis loans

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Applications 000s	1,111	1,022	[1]1,057
Initial Awards 000s	832	765	[1]803
Awards as percentage of Applications	75	75	76

[1] These are initial figures and may be subject to amendment before the publication in the summer of the Annual Report by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund for 1997–98.

Appeals

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals made against decisions following an all-work-test were heard in each of the last four quarters for which figures are available; and what proportion of these were decided in the appellant's favour where the appellant *(a)* attended the hearing but was not represented, *(b)* was represented but did not attend, *(c)* attended and was represented and *(d)* did not attend and was not represented. [39693]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is set out in the table.

All work test—total

Quarter		*31 December 1996*	*31 March 1997*	*30 June 1997*	*30 September 1997*
1. Total	Number	13,958	13,307	17,382	16,950
In appellants favour	Number	6,459	6,003	7,543	6,641
	Per cent.	46.27	45.11	43.40	39.18
2. Total	Number	4,885	4,513	5,467	4,734
In appellants favour	Number	2,499	2,297	2,844	2,419
	Per cent.	51.16	50.90	52.02	51.10
3. Total	Number	244	229	302	279
In appellants favour	Number	125	121	145	111
	Per cent.	51.23	52.84	48.01	39.78
4. Total	Number	5,181	4,937	5,863	4,875
In appellants favour	Number	3,502	3,247	3,934	3,346
	Per cent.	67.59	65.77	67.10	68.64
5. Total	Number	3,648	3,628	5,750	7,062
In appellants favour	Number	333	338	620	765
	Per cent.	9.13	9.32	10.78	10.83

Notes:
1. Total appeals heard.
2. Appellant only attended.
3. Representative only attended.
4. Both attended.
5. Not attended.

Source:
The quarterly Social Security Appeal Tribunal statistics published by DSS Analytical Services Division.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average length of time taken for an appeal made against a decision to remove incapacity benefit following an all work test to be processed; [39712]

(2) how many incapacity benefit appeals are awaiting hearing. [39711]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In the quarter ending 30 September 1997, the average length of time taken to process an Incapacity Benefit appeal was 29 weeks. The time taken to hear an Incapacity Benefit appeal following an All Work Test is the same whether the appeal concerns a decision to remove Incapacity Benefit or an initial refusal to award it.

Incapacity Benefit Appeals awaiting hearing

Quarter ending 30 September 1997	
Incapacity Benefit (All Work Test)	27,645
Incapacity Benefit (Not All Work Test)	5,107
Total	32,752

Source:
The quarterly Social Security Appeal Tribunal statistics published by DSS Analytical Services Division.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the sums allocated to the Independent Tribunal Service from the Social Security Budget in each of the last three financial years. [39707]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Budget allocated to the Independent Tribunal Service for administration costs

£ million

Year	*Allocation to the Independent Tribunal Service*
1995–96	47.307
1996–97	55.107
1997–98	56.338

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines her Department follows in determining whether advertising campaigns are appropriate. [39708]

Mr. Field: The Department follows the guidelines laid down in the Mountfield Report which was published by the Cabinet Office on 27 November 1997. A copy of this report is in the Library. This draws on existing Cabinet Office guidelines on conventions on publicity and advertising "Guidance on Government Advertising and Publicity".

The main conventions are that

"It is right and proper for governments to use public funds for publicity and advertising to explain their policies and to inform the public of the government services available to them and of their rights and liabilities . . . This basic rule covering all government publicity and advertising has been accepted under successive administrations."

Decisions are made in accordance with the above guidance taking into account such considerations as cost effectiveness and accountability.

Lone Parents

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the timescale for assessing the effectiveness of the New Deal for lone parents pilots; and what measurements will be used to assess the success or failure of the scheme. [39709]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A report comparing the short-term and longer-term outcomes for lone parents in the eight New Deal for Lone Parents lead areas with those in six control areas will be published around Autumn 1999.

The impact of the first phase of the New Deal for Lone Parents will be measured by comparing outcomes for lone parents in the lead areas with the outcomes for a similar, but geographically separate, group of lone parents in control areas. The control areas provide a benchmark or 'counterfactual' by which to assess the impact of the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Administrative data are being collected at the same time for both lead and control areas. For tracking purposes, these data will be collected for six months after the national rollout of the New Deal for Lone Parents to all lone parents in October 1998. Carefully selected samples of lone parents in the control areas will also be interviewed, as will lone parents in the lead areas.

Any additional movements into work in the New Deal for Lone Parents areas over and above that which occurs in the control areas can be attributed to the New Deal for Lone Parents itself, after allowing for changes in the local labour markets and other demographic factors. In addition, the comparison will show any additional movement into education and training as a step towards future labour market participation.

The Employment Service will be responsible for evaluating the national programme of the New Deal for Lone Parents from October 1998. The Employment Service is currently drafting a joint evaluation strategy in conjunction with the Department of Social Security and the Department for Education and Employment. This evaluation strategy will cover the period from national rollout to all lone parents in October 1998 through the lifetime of this Parliament.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information is being collected in the control areas in the New Deal for Lone Parents on the demography of those *(a)* participating and *(b)* refusing to participate. [39714]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Up to the beginning of April the New Deal for Lone Parents was available to lone parents in eight lead areas. In six other, control areas a variety of demographic information is being collected to help evaluate the effect of the New Deal for Lone Parents. However, since the New Deal for Lone Parents was not operational in these six areas, there are no participant or non-participant lone parents.

The information collected in the control areas is:

(i) Survey data on lone parents' patterns of employment and movements into work, their qualifications and training, partnership and family histories.

(ii) Income Support data for all lone parents which provide information on their full Income Support claim, date of birth, gender, number and age of children and number of non-dependants.

Pensions

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the publication date of the Initial Framework for Change relating to pensions will be. [39647]

Mr. Denham: The pensions review is looking at the central areas for elderly people, including all aspects of the basic pension and its value. A key objective of the review is to ensure that pensioners should have an adequate income in retirement; that they should share fairly in rising national prosperity; and that public finances should be both sustainable and affordable.

As set out in the Green Paper, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare" (Cm 3805), we will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year. There will then be a period of further consultation before final detailed proposals are developed.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons under pensionable age were receiving incapacity benefit *(a)* at the latest date for which figures are available and *(b)* in April 1995. [39710]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Number of people under pension age in receipt of Incapacity Benefit on 12 April 1995	*Number of people under pension age in receipt of Incapacity Benefit on 30 November 1997*
1,594,800	1,561,580

Note:
The April 1995 figure is from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, the 1997 figure is taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the INCAP computer system and excludes a small number of cases held clerically.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to extend the Benefit Integrity Project to cover those claiming the lower rates of DLA. [39649]

Mr. Denham: The Government are responsible for ensuring that the right money goes to the right people. It is sensible to check from time that people are receiving their correct entitlement, but there are no plans at present to extend the Benefit Integrity Project to lower rates of Disability Living Allowance. Should any such plans arise, no action would be taken without full consultation with organisations of and for disabled people.

HEALTH

Contraceptive Pill

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect which charging for the contraceptive pill would have on the level of unwanted pregnancies in Britain. [37833]

Ms Jowell: No detailed assessment has been made as no such proposal is under consideration. Published studies suggest that any such charges would result in an increase in unwanted conceptions.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce hospital waiting lists for patients in Sunderland; and if he will make a statement. [37863]

Mr. Milburn: In his Budget last month, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made an extra £417 million available to the National Health Service in England for 1998/99. £320 million of this will be used specifically to cut waiting lists. All health authorities and NHS trusts will be set waiting list targets to reduce the number of people awaiting hospital admission to less than 1.16 million by 31 March 1999, taking the total to below the record level inherited by the Government. Provisional management information indicates that on 31 March 1998 there were no English residents waiting more than 18 months for admission to hospital.

Prescription Charges

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in the last full year for which figures are available *(a)* what was the total cost to the NHS of medicines and treatments issued by prescription, *(b)* how much of this cost was recouped by prescription charges, *(c)* how much would be recouped if the prescription charge was levied only once for all the items which comprise a specific course of treatment purchased on a single prescription, *(d)* how much would be recouped if the retail price was paid by the patient whenever it was less than the prescription charge and *(e)* how much would be recouped if the changes set out in (c) and (d) were both implemented. [38195]

Mr. Milburn: The information available in respect of 1996–97 for England is:

the total cost to the National Health Service of prescriptions dispensed £4,519 million

amount collected[1] in prescription charges (including sales of pre-payment certificates): £296 million

information on how much would be recouped if all the items for a single course of treatment was purchased on a single prescription is not available

reduction in the amount that would have been collected[2] if the charge had been restricted to the cost to the NHS[3] when this was lower than the prescription charge: £50 million

Information on how much would be recouped if both of these changes were implemented is not available.

Notes:

[1] by pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors

[2] by pharmacists and appliance contractors only for items charged at the point of dispensing. There would also be an unquantifiable effect in the amount collected by dispensing doctors and from the sale of pre-payment certificates

[3] information about retail prices is not available in this context

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce single vaccine components of MMR. [38141]

Ms Jowell: No. Following the scientific seminar organised by the Medical Research Council, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to all health professionals on 27 March concluding:

"I therefore recommend that children should receive measles, mumps and rubella vaccine at the appropriate times, and should not be given the separate component vaccines, since there is no evidence that doing this has any benefit and it may even be harmful."

Copies of the full letter are in the Library.

The World Health Organisation has written to the Department advising:

"We believe none of these data in the Lancet of 28 February 1998 provide a basis for providing the different components of this vaccine in separate schedules. We wished to inform you of this as a means of offering you and your colleagues support in remaining firm in supporting the continued use of this highly effective vaccine which has such an outstanding safety record."

The option of separate vaccine immunisation is not supported by an studies into its safety or efficacy.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccination

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instigate an independent inquiry into the effects of the MMR vaccination. [39650]

Ms Jowell: The effects of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) immunisation have been carefully examined by two groups of independent experts: the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the Committee on Safety of Medicines. In addition, following the recent publicity about possible adverse reactions to MMR, a group of 37 independent experts was convened by the Medical Research Council (MRC) on 23 March under the chairmanship of Professor Sir John Pattison. The group examined published and unpublished research into a suggested association between MMR vaccine and Crohn's disease and autism. The independent experts concluded:

The available virological and epidemiological evidence does not support a causal role for persistent measles virus infection in Crohn's disease.

There is no evidence to indicate any link between MMR vaccination and bowel disease or autism.

There is therefore no reason for a change in the current MMR vaccination policy.

As a result, the Chief Medical Officer has advised that:

"Based on the previous material that I have seen, and on the opinions of experts present at the MRC meeting, I have concluded that there is no link between measles, measles vaccine or MMR immunisation, Crohn's disease and autistic spectrum disorders. Together with others at the meeting, I was not convinced that any of the studies support suggestions that measles or MMR vaccines are implicated in Crohn's disease or in autism. I therefore recommend that children should receive MMR vaccine at the appropriate times, and should not be given the separate component vaccines, since there is no evidence that doing this has any benefit and it may even be harmful."

Pathogens (Sales)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria applied to the export of pathogens from the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research at Porton Down between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 1989; and what criteria are applied now. [38834]

Mr. Milburn: Since the formation of the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research in 1979, any request relating to the export of pathogens has been carefully considered on a case by case basis, taking due cognisance of the relevant export control legislation and guidance issued by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what records were kept of the sale of pathogens from his Department's installations between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 1989; and what records are kept now. [38832]

Mr. Milburn: Records are kept of all customers who purchase material from the European Collection of Cell Cultures, Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research (CAMR); the National Collection of Type Cultures, Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS); and the National Collection of Pathogenic Fungi, PHLS.

The databases maintained at each of the culture collections include the name and address of the customer, the date, details of the material supplied and the price charged. This arrangement has been in place at CAMR since 1979. The records at the PHLS National Collection of Type Cultures date from October 1985 and there is an additional record of computer generated sales invoices, stored in date sequence, dating from mid-1988. The records held at the PHLS National Collection of Pathogenic Fungi date from the 1970s.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what pathogens were sold and at what price to the American Type Culture Collection in Rockville, Maryland, by the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research at Porton Down between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 1989. [38833]

Mr. Milburn: The centre for applied microbiology and research has not sold or supplied any pathogens to the American type culture collection between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 1989.

Consultant Contracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake an inquiry to establish the extent to which NHS consultants are not fulfilling their NHS contracts. [39333]

Mr. Milburn: We do not believe that an inquiry would serve a useful purpose. The evidence is that the vast majority of National Health Service consultants make a full and welcome contribution to patient care. NHS managers should take action locally where they believe that an individual consultant is not meeting NHS commitments under the terms of his or her contract.

Aricept

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Standing Medical Advisory Committee will publish its report on the drug Aricept. [39646]

Mr. Boateng: The Standing Medical Advisory Committee's guidance to clinicians on the use of donepezil (Aricept) for Alzheimer's disease will be distributed to health authorities shortly.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SIXTH SERIES OFFICIAL REPORT **VOLUME 310**

SESSION 1997–98

6th April—24th April 1998

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A13
Traffic noise 669-70w

A47
(21.04.98) 723-30

A380
Road construction 550w

A550
Road traffic control 313w

Abandoned cars
Local authority powers 523-4w
Police powers 523-4w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
China, Exports 150
Millennium Exhibition, Corporate plans 477
Welfare to work 950-1

Aberdeen
Youth unemployment 586-7

Abortion
Barnet 631w
Medical ethics 195w
Refugees 412-3w, 634w
Scotland 582w

Absent voting
Fees and charges 519w

Absenteeism
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 73-4w

Access Committee for England
Finance 126-7w

Access to buildings
Polling stations 258-9w

Access to countryside
Church property 445w

Access to Health Records Act 1990
Questions
190-1w

Accident and emergency departments
Hospital closures 118w

Accidents
Medical treatments 104w, 107w, 124w, 436w
Northern Ireland 436w
Scotland 107w
Wales 104w

Acid rain
13w

Action 2000
350-1w
Members' correspondence 349w
Public appointments 58w

Administration of justice
Mentally disadvantaged 568w
Public interest 602w
Young offenders 533w

Admiralty Board
468w

Admissibility of evidence
Northern Ireland 648-9w

Admission charges
Museums and galleries 41w

Adult education
Welsh language 209w

Advance corporation tax
696w

Advertising
Dept of Social Security 729-30w
London Underground 289w

Advertising controls
Children 230w

Advertising Standards Authority
358w

Advisory bodies
Wales 690w

Advisory services
Immigration 174-5w
Scotland 175w

Afghanistan
Overseas aid 238-9w
Women 325-6w

Afro-Caribbeans
Prison discipline 636w

Age discrimination
Health services 506-7w

Agency nurses
Scotland 114w

Agent 15
Defence research 650w

Aggregates
Quarrying 10w

Agricultural products
Prices 213w

Agricultural subsidies
Lincolnshire 346
Scotland 460-1w
Wales 103w, 211w

Agriculture
Dorset (20.04.98) 563-74
Exchange rates 951-2
Innovation 81-2w
Wales 804-6

AIDS
Vaccination 615w

Ainger, Mr Nick
Questions
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Administrative costs 277-8w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Defence contracts 276-7w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Ministry of Defence Police 52w
Firing ranges, Pendine 276w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Countryside, Public petitions (06.04.98) 132

Air accidents
Disclosure of information 55w
Military aircraft 470w

Air conditioning
Millennium Exhibition 77-8w

Air fares
Competition 345w

Air force
(23.04.98) 979-1063
Festivals and special occasions 13-4

Air force bases
45w

Air pollution control
Budget March 1998 42w
Carbon dioxide 428-9w, 584-5w
Industry 710-1w
Scotland 584-5w

Air safety
284w

Air traffic control
Millennium compliance 583

Air Training Corps
50w

Air transport
Scotland 106w

Aircraft carriers
4-5
Defence procurement 4

Aircraft equipment
Counterfeit manufacturing 291w

Aircrew
Military aircraft 221w

Albania
320-1w

Alcoholism
Armed forces 278-9w

Alexander, Mr Douglas
Questions
NHS trusts, Scotland 579-80

Allan, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 441-2
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 533
Questions
Government departments, Inquiries 688-90w
Housing benefits, Political refugees 394w
Income support, Political refugees 134w
Political refugees, Government grants to local authorities 118-9w
Political refugees, Local government expenditure 120-2w

Allen, Mr Graham, Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1106

Altcourse Prison
260-1w

Alternative energy
161w
Dept of Trade and Industry 352w

Alyn and Deeside
Council house sales 314w
EC grants and loans 314w

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education, Essex (08.04.98) 301-3
Questions
Abortion, Scotland 582w
Artificial insemination 118w
Family law, Law reform 567w
Human embryo experiments 364w
Married personal allowance 620-2w
Members' conduct 17
Middle East, Peace negotiations 200w
Personal tax allowances 620-2w

Ammunition
Uranium 52w, 221-2w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (22.04.98) 804
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 805-6
Air traffic control, Millennium compliance 583
EC grants and loans, Wales 803
Grampian Police 578-9

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 165-6w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Questions
Middle East, EC external relations 140-1

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council
432w

Animal experiments
513-4w, 559-61w
Primates 26w

Animal feed
Antibiotics 79-80w
Pigs 83-4w
Testing 487w

Animal quarantine
83w, 488w

Animal welfare
Circuses 260w
EC enlargement 153
Export of live animals 665w
Pigs 218w
Poultry 662-3w, 719w
Research 469-70w

Anthrax
21w, 143w, 347, 465-6w
King's Cross Station 301w

Antibiotics
Animal feed 79-80w

Antidumping duties
Cotton (08.04.98) 275-7

Aricept
Standing Medical Advisory Committee 734w

Armed conflict
Kosovo 145-6, 200-1w

Armed forces
467w
Alcoholism 278-9w
Clothing 715-7w
Criminal proceedings 54-5w
Millennium compliance 220-1w
Social class 50-1w

Armed forces deployment
55w
Germany 1-3, 47w
Gulf states 12, 153-4
Israel 141
Macedonia 145-6
Middle East 56-7w
Persian Gulf 11, 46w, 49w
USA 219-20w

Armed forces recruitment
Ethnic minorities 45-6w

Armed forces reserves
276w

Armed forces training
57-8w
Defence land 46w
Shoeburyness 51w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 468w

Armed forces women
Equal opportunities 49w

Armoured fighting vehicles
Defence procurement 649-50w

Arms embargoes
Serbia 687-8w

Arms exports
Annual reports 321w
Export licensing 5-7, 149-50, 346-7w, 508w

Arms trade
198w
Indonesia 345-6w
Iraq 163w

Armstrong, Hilary, Minister of State for Local Government and Housing, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Audit Commission Review Advisory Group 290w
Local government, Ethics 10-1w
Local Government Staff Commission England 145w

Army
Racial harassment 51w

Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency
Closures 276w
Performance standards 274-5w

Army bases
York (22.04.98) 776-83

Army Board
468w

Army in Northern Ireland
650-1w
Death 462-5w
Disclosure of information 76w
Prisoners 814-5
Proscribed organisations 180w, 272w

Army strength
Territorial Army 14-5, 46-8w

Army Technical Support Agency
Departmental publications 468-70w

Arrest warrants
Magistrates' courts 706w

Arrests
Football 558-9w

Art works
EC law 508-10w
Inheritance tax 251-2w
Theft 139w

Artificial insemination
118w

Arts
Trade promotion 147-8

Arts finance
Greater London 464

Asbestos
EC external trade 156w
Imports 157w
Industrial diseases 191-2w
Manufactured goods 156-8w

Ashby de la Zouch
Bypasses (08.04.98) 284-7

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 485-6
Questions
Educational finance 812-3
Northern Ireland government 345-6

Asia
Economic situation 816

Astronomy
Research finance 616w

Asylum
see Political refugees

Atkins, Charlotte
Questions
Defence Postal and Courier Services, Performance standards 275w
Defence Transport and Movements Executive, Performance standards 275-6w
Waste management, Staffordshire 9w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Action 2000, Members' correspondence 349w
Action 2000, Public appointments 58w

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1127
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1113
Questions
New deal schemes, Hexham 339w
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust 196w

Atkinson, Stephanie
Legal Aid Board (08.04.98) 326-34

Atomic Weapons Establishment
Departmental publications 552w

Attorney General
Theft 438-9w

Audit Commission Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
231-2w

Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales
Information 289w

Audit Commission Review Advisory Group
290w

Austin, Mr John
Questions
Accidents, Medical treatments 104w, 107w, 124w, 436w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 200-1w
Osteoporosis 122-3w
Osteoporosis, Northern Ireland 436-8w
Osteoporosis, Scotland 106-7w
Osteoporosis, Wales 104w, 212w

Autism
Special education 659-60w

Automation
Social security payments 133w

Average earnings
Northern Ireland 179w

AWE Aldermaston
552-3w

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Armed forces, Points of order (06.04.98) 21
Prime Minister, Information officers (24.04.98) 1152-6, 1158, 1160
Questions
Aggregates, Quarrying 10w
Animal experiments, Primates 26w
Animal welfare, Circuses 260w
Armed forces deployment, USA 219-20w
Bishops, Official cars 475
Budget, Environmental policy 245w, 624w
Competition Bill (HL) 1997/98 142w
Duty free allowances 697w
Energy research, Expenditure 354w
Environment protection, Procurement 69-70w
Food Standards Agency 85w

***Baker, Norman**—continued*
Genetically modified organisms, Environment protection 10w, 285-6w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 82w
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 567-8w
Land ownership and tenure, Scottish Office 164-5w
Landfill tax 9-10w
Lewes Prison, Prison medical services 26w
Mass media, Ownership 58w, 68w
Mass media, Shareholders 58-9w
Members' conduct, Oral questions 17-8
MI5, Disclosure of information 25w
Millennium Exhibition, Air conditioning 77-8w
Millennium Exhibition, Building workers 78w
Millennium Exhibition, Sponsorship 318w
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 417-8w
Minister without Portfolio, Ministerial duties 69w
Nature conservation, Cardigan Bay 807
Open government 73w
Oral questions 71w
RAF Menwith Hill, Telephone tapping 9-10
Railway accidents, Glynde 417w
Railway freight transport 10w
Strategic Communications Unit 72-3w
Structure plans, Transport policy 709w
Taxation, Mobility allowance 242w
Tipping of waste, Derelict land 9w
Transport policy, Dept of Trade and Industry 59w
Transport policy, Northern Ireland Office 645w
Xenotransplantation 123w

Balance of payments
Lloyd's of London 249-50w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Questions
Business questions 975
Council tax, Oxfordshire 813-4
Marginal tax rates, Families 964-5
Territorial Army 46w

Balkans
Ministers' visits abroad 320-1w

Ballard, Jackie
Questions
Christianity, Religious freedom 88-9w
Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 289w
Sheep dipping 219w

Ballistic missile defence
9

Baltic states
Foreign relations 201w

Bananas
Developing countries trade 492w

Bank of England
632w
Exchange rates 695w
Interest rates 966-7

Bank of England Act 1998
Questions
701w

Bank of England Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (20.04.98) 503-8
Royal Assent (23.04.98) 995

Banking supervision
407-8w

Bankruptcy
Farmers 83w, 103w

Banks
Northern Ireland 190w

***Banks, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 178, 182, 191, 250-5
Questions
Boxing, Women 566w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 33w
Inland waterways, Repairs and maintenance 565w
Lottery distributors 139-41w
Sports, EC action 142w
Sports facilities, Local government functions 33w
Sportsmark 33w
Thai boxing, Finance 565w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Questions
Income tax, Derbyshire 696w
Northern Ireland government 338-40
Prescribing Supply and Administration of Medicines Review Team 578w

Barnet
Abortion 631w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Questions
Coalfields Task Force 418-9w
Derelict land, Planning permission 418w

***Battle, Mr John**, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 737-8, 741, 743-4, 746, 748-51
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 120, 123-7
Questions
Alternative energy 161w
Astronomy, Research finance 616w
British Standards Institution 159-60w
Calor Gas, Gas tariffs 155w
Coal, Reviews 511w
Coal mining, Pension funds 67-8w, 357w
Coal mining, Respiratory diseases 359w
Domestic electrical appliances, Recycling 67w
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 511w
Electricity supply industry 510w
Energy research, Expenditure 354w
Extractive industries, Environmental impact assessment 163w
Extractive industries, Hazardous wastes 356w
Extractive industries, Life insurance 356w
Food, Research 354-5w
Gas pipelines 162w
Industry, Air pollution control 710-1w
Institute of Food Research 352-3w
Land pollution, Industrial research 709-10w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 563-4w
Offshore drilling, Sea pollution 154-6w
Petrol, Prices 160w
Petrol additives, Standards specifications 160w
Publications, Retail trade 510w
Radioactive waste disposal, Japan 66-7w
Radioactive wastes, Orders and regulations 351-2w
Smuggling, Radioactive materials 616-7w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 983, 992, 998, 1001

***Bayley, Mr Hugh**—continued*
Army bases, York (22.04.98) 776-9, 782
Town and country planning, Vale of York (22.04.98) 787
Questions
EC Finance Council 953-4
Young offenders 21-3w
Young offenders, Community service orders 24w
Young offenders, Prison accommodation 23-4w

BBC
Digital broadcasting 563w
Parliamentary broadcasting (08.04.98) 272-5
Private companies 564w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Negligence, Compensation (08.04.98) 453-6

***Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret**, President of the Board of Trade*
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 85, 91-102
Questions
Air fares, Competition 345w
Alternative energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 352w
British National Space Centre, Operating costs 64w
British Telecom, Broadcasting 671-2w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministers' visits abroad 64w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Private finance initiative 355w
EC Internal Market Council 360-1w
Education and industry 348-9w
Energy resources 162w
Exchange rates 63w
Manufacturing industries, Redundancy 161-2w
Mass media, Ownership 58w
Mass media, Shareholders 58-9w
Millennium compliance, EC action 349w
Millennium compliance, Telephone services 349w
Newsprint, Recycling 353w
Paper industry, Trade competitiveness 353-4w
Post Office 63w
Public utilities, Regulatory systems 61w, 616w
Research councils 65-6w
Supermarkets, Closures 356w
Transport policy, Dept of Trade and Industry 59w
World War II, Personal property 62-3w

Beef
Exports 337-8
Northern Ireland 337-8
Scotland 577-8
Wales 805

Beef Bones Regulations 1997
Questions
Judgments 717-8w

Beef premiums
82w

Beekeeping
(22.04.98) 752-75

Begg, Miss Anne
Questions
New deal schemes, Scotland 586-7

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 865, 881, 892, 910, 919
Questions
Northern Ireland government 74-5w
Seagate, Northern Ireland 645-6w
Welfare to work, Northern Ireland 336

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 371-2, 378, 383, 400-7
Questions
Altcourse Prison 260-1w
Bridgend Prison, Private finance initiative 518w
Charities, Non-domestic rates 8w
Class sizes 331w
Home Office, Public expenditure 260w
Magistrates' courts, Arrest warrants 706w
NHS trusts, North East region 362w
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust 196-7w
Parc Prison 260w
Passports, Fraud 517-8w
Police, Departmental circulars 635w
Police, Manpower 703-4w
Television licences, Fine defaulters 518w
UK Detention Services, Contracts 517w

Belarus
Overseas aid 239w

Belfast
Community relations 180w
Empty housing 180w

Belgium
Economic and monetary union 955

Bell, Mr Martin
Questions
Ministry of Defence Police 49w
Special Educational Needs National Advisory Group 335w

***Bell, Mr Stuart**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Questions
Bishops, Official cars 475
Church Commissioners, Accountability 446w
Church Commissioners, Annual reports 163-4w
Church Commissioners, Investment 475-6
Church Commissioners, Public appointments 446-9w
Church Commissioners, Westminster Abbey 445w
Church property, Access to countryside 445w

Benefit integrity project
Disability living allowance 133w, 387-8w, 642-3w, 731w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benefits Agency district offices
Tayside (07.04.98) 262-8

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 706-9
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 489
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 824

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 529
Questions
Recycling, Plastics 143-4w

Benzodiazepines
Prescriptions 615w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Beekeeping (22.04.98) 768, 773
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 698, 700, 703-4
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 617
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 96
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 495-6
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 24, 32, 56, 58-9, 69
Questions
EC grants and loans, Information services 205w
Economic and monetary union 148w
Euro 150w
European Commission 89w
Fisheries, EC grants and loans 663-4w
Fishing vessels 673w
Health action zones, Wales 806-7
Minimum wage 347-8
Newspaper press, Ownership 73w
Official hospitality, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 1w
Official hospitality, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 321w
Official hospitality, Lord Chancellor's Dept 320w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Defence 280w
Official hospitality, Prime Minister 68w
Sentencing, Scotland 585-6

Beresford, Sir Paul
Questions
New deal for young unemployed 92w

Berlin airlift
Festivals and special occasions 13-4

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 390-1

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Disability Rights Commission 686w
Gaming 518-9w

Best, Mr Harold
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 65-6

Betting and gaming duties
246-7w, 694w

Bhutan
Overseas aid 18w
Refugees 90w

Bicycles
Train operating units 1w

Bilderberg Group
353w

Birds of prey
Nature conservation 266w

Birmingham
Criminal proceedings 320w
Eurostar 422w

Bishops
Official cars 475

Blackman, Mrs Liz
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 630

Blaenau Gwent
NHS trusts 801

Blair, Tony
Members' attendance 16

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Questions
Anthrax 143w
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 814-5
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 816-7
Cabinet committees, Millennium compliance 72w
Cancer, Medical treatments 817-8
Civil service, Codes of practice 70w
Competition Bill (HL) 1997/98 142w
Council tax, Oxfordshire 813-4
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 818
Economic situation, Asia 816
Educational finance 812-4
Environment protection, Procurement 69-70w
First time buyers, Married people 71w
Flood control 813
Foreign policy, Ethics 71-2w
Foreign relations 72w
Higher civil servants, Civil service recruitment 674w
Israel, Festivals and special occasions 142w
Mass media, Ownership 68w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 810-2, 815
Millennium compliance 72w
Millennium compliance, International cooperation 406w
Minister without Portfolio, Ministerial duties 69w
Murdoch, Rupert 71w
Newspaper press, Ownership 73w
Non-departmental public bodies 68-9w, 717w
Northern Ireland government 811, 815-6
Nuclear power, Treaties 70w
Official engagements 651w
Official hospitality, Prime Minister 68w
Official residences 407w, 674-5w
Official visits, Members' partners 72w, 675w
Oral questions 71w
Prime Minister, Civil servants 675w
Security Vetting Appeals Panel 675-6w
Strategic Communications Unit 72-3w
Trade promotion 73w
Trade union recognition 406w
Unemployment, Statistics 817
Welsh Office, Secretaries of State 71w
World Cup, Tickets 818-20

Blears, Ms Hazel
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 412-5

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
A47 (21.04.98) 726-7
Essex and Suffolk Water, Bungay (08.04.98) 290-2
Questions
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 153

Blood
Wales 573w

Blood donors
Wales 209w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 989-90, 992, 998, 1017, 1023, 1043-7
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 95
Ministerial statements, Points of order (22.04.98) 828-9
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 493-4
Oral question time intervention (22.04.98) 818
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1103-4, 1122
Questions
Court Service, Operating costs 567w
Defence, Malaysia 3-4
EC common foreign and security policy 199w
Emergency services, Millennium compliance 582-3
Export licensing, Administrative delays 59w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

***Boateng, Mr Paul**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Negligence, Compensation (08.04.98) 456-60
Questions
Breast cancer, Death 505w
Breast cancer, Screening 193-4w
Breast cancer, Tamoxifen 575-6w
Cervical cancer, Death 505-6w
Cervical cancer, Screening 125w, 505w, 614-5w
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Fund 507w
Cleft palate 575-6w
Ear disorders, Young people 369w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 506w
Health services, Age discrimination 506-7w
Hip replacements, Wales 574-5w
Industrial diseases, Asbestos 191-2w
Intercountry adoption 363w
Mental patients 192-3w
Midwives, Primary health care 369w
Nursery schools, Local government expenditure 128w
Political refugees, Government grants to local authorities 118-9w
Political refugees, Local government expenditure 120-2w
Post traumatic stress disorder, Counselling 372w
Prescription drugs, Children 613-4w
Psychiatric nurses, Community health services 370w
Respite care 124w
Respite care, Handicapped children 195-6w
Social services, Inspections 116w
Special hospitals, Hospital waiting lists 125-6w
Standing Medical Advisory Committee, Aricept 734w
Xenotransplantation 123w

Body, Sir Richard
Questions
Special education, Autism 659-60w

Bolton
Incapacity benefit 642-3w

Bombings
Lockerbie 579, 588

Borrow, Mr David
Questions
Armed forces reserves 276w
Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency, Closures 276w

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 30, 37-8, 42, 60, 70-4
Questions
Coal, Reviews 511w
Culture, National income 139w
Exchange rates 951
Post Office, Competition 562w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 388
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1075, 1079-83, 1091, 1095, 1114
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 40-4, 52
Questions
Civil service, Codes of practice 70w
Driving, Diabetes 547-8w
Murdoch, Rupert 71w
NHS, Expenditure 576-7w
Police, Ethnic minorities 519w, 635w
Population, Age 561-2w
Road accidents, Cycling 298w
Road accidents, Diabetes 547w
Road accidents, Northern Ireland 270-1w
Road accidents, Pedestrians 297-300w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 198, 207-10
Questions
Arts finance, Greater London 464
British Council 148
Higher civil servants, Civil service recruitment 674w
Intercountry adoption 363w
Members' allowances, Members' attendance 35w
Millennium Exhibition, Religion 478
Royal Naval College, Ministers' domestic visits 51w
Voluntary organisations 259w

Boundary Commission for Wales
Public appointments 635w

Bournemouth
Orchestras (08.04.98) 278-9

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
81w
Devon 673w
Disease control 81w, 212-3w, 218w, 577-8, 816-7

Bovine tuberculosis
Disease control 210w, 570w, 646-7w
Northern Ireland 646-7w
Wales 210w

Boxing
Women 566w

***Bradley, Mr Keith**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social Fund, Tayside (07.04.98) 265-8
Questions
Child Support Agency 132w, 376-7w
Child Support Agency, Complaints 374-5w
Child Support Agency, Performance standards 130-1w

***Bradley, Mr Keith**—continued*
Child Support Agency, Postal services 131-2w
Disability appeal tribunals 137-8w
Disability living allowance, Social security appeals 382w, 640w
Disability working allowance, Departmental forms 641w
Family credit, Welfare milk 378w
Housing benefits 135w
Housing benefits, Earnings rules 135w
Housing benefits, Expenditure 383-4w
Housing benefits, Political refugees 394w
Housing benefits, Social security reform 383w
Incapacity benefit, Seaham 222-3w
Incapacity benefit, Social security appeals 605-6w, 728-9w
Income support, Political refugees 134w
Income support, Social security benefits disqualification 391w
Income support, Take-up 136w
Independent Tribunal Service 382w
Independent Tribunal Service, Finance 729w
Jobseeker's allowance 540-1w
Jobseeker's allowance, Insurance 136-7w, 540w
Lone parents, Departmental publications 224w
Lone parents, Income support 539w, 604-5w
Lone parents, Scotland 538w
Lone parents, Social security benefits 388-91w
Maintenance, Children 129-30w, 132-3w, 374-6w
New deal for disabled people, Mobility of disabled 541w
New deal for lone parents 224w, 730-1w
New deal for lone parents, Manpower 537-8w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 606-7w
Social security claims 373w
Social security claims, Medical examinations 393-4w

Bradley, Mr Peter
Questions
Armoured fighting vehicles, Defence procurement 649-50w

Bradshaw, Mr Ben
Questions
Educational finance 814
Macedonia, Armed forces deployment 146
Royal parks, Cycleways 451w

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 125
Questions
Absent voting, Fees and charges 519w
Cancer, Medical treatments 817-8
Council tax, Discounts 652w
Economic and monetary union, Belgium 955
Educational finance, Scotland 581w
Educational psychology, Pupil-teacher ratios 498-500w
Educational standards 331-4w
Second homes, Wales 104w

Brake, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1078-9
Questions
Air safety 284w
London Underground, Advertising 289w

Brand, Dr Peter
Questions
NHS and private practice, Income 373w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 311-3, 317-8
Questions
Armed forces deployment 55w
Consumer education 645w
Koschnick, Hans 205w
Military aircraft, Aircrew 221w
Territorial Army, Army strength 46-8w

Breast cancer
45w
Death 505w
Screening 193-4w, 369-70w
Tamoxifen 575-6w

Breed, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Energy Efficiency Bill, Points of order (24.04.98) 1147
Questions
Civil service agencies, Efficiency scrutinies 310w
Gas pipelines 162w
Prescription drugs 124w
Public utilities, Regulatory systems 61w, 616w

Breeding and Sale of Dogs Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (24.04.98) 1147

Bridgend Prison
Private finance initiative 518w

Brighton
Piers 463

Brinton, Mrs Helen
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 400
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 631-2

British Broadcasting Corporation
see BBC

British Council
148

British Horseracing Board
176w

British Museum (Lindisfarne Gospels) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (08.04.98) 365-9

British National Space Centre
Operating costs 64w

British residents abroad
Retirement pensions 604w

British Sky Broadcasting
Digital broadcasting 563w
Millennium Exhibition 477

British Standards Institution
159-60w

British Telecom
Broadcasting 671-2w

British Transport Police
305w

British-Irish Interparliamentary Body
Ulster Unionists 341

Broadcasting
British Telecom 671-2w

Broadcasting Act 1996
Questions
229-30w, 465

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Business questions (20.04.98) 501-2
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 634, 641, 654-8
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 544, 558-60
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 199, 201-6
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 882
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1074
Questions
Windfall tax 960

Brown, Rt Hon Gordon, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Debates etc.
Tax Credits (Initial Expenditure) Bill, 1R (23.04.98) 978
Questions
Bank of England, Exchange rates 695w
Duty free allowances 955
EC Finance Council 953-4
Economic and monetary union 949-50, 954, 956-7
Economic and monetary union, Belgium 955
Economic policy 949
Euro 954
European Central Bank 954-5
Exchange rates 694w, 951-3
Exchange rates, Agriculture 951-2
Interest rates, Sterling 952
Personal savings 950
Public sector borrowing requirement, EC countries 696w
Public sector debt 697w
Unemployment 957
Unemployment, EC countries 956
Welfare to work 696w, 950-1, 958
Working families tax credit 698w

Brown, Mr Russell
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 581w

Browne, Mr Desmond
Questions
Sentencing, Scotland 585

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 705

Bruce, Mr Ian
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 272w
Indonesia 199w
Land Registry, Weymouth 568w
Nigeria, Presidential elections 155

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 620-3, 647, 683, 686
Questions
Absenteeism, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 73-4w
Armed forces, Millennium compliance 220-1w
Budget, Environmental policy 38w
Budget, Official publications 253-4w
Earned income 618w
Economic and monetary union 949-50

Bruce, Mr Malcolm—continued
Emergency services, Millennium compliance 583
Individual savings accounts, Tax yields 244w
Marginal tax rates 36w
NHS finance 373w
Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Executive, Millennium compliance 183w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Defence 649w
Public expenditure 38-40w
Tax yields 36w
Working families tax credit, Employment opportunities 35-6w

Buck, Ms Karen
Questions
Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, Information 289w
London Lighthouse 362w

Budget
Environmental policy 38w, 245w, 624w
Official publications 253-4w

Budget March 1998
Air pollution control 42w
Family income 959

Building Act 1984
Questions
551w

Building (Approved Inspectors Etc) Regulations 1985
Questions
551w

Building industry
Consumer protection 15-6w

Building regulations
16-7w
Industrial health and safety 551w
Private sector 427w

Building Regulations 1991
Questions
551w, 611w

Building workers
Millennium Exhibition 78w, 320w

Bungay
Essex and Suffolk Water (08.04.98) 290-2

Burden, Mr Richard
Questions
Motor vehicle registration 143w
Road tax 245-6w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 626
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 314
Questions
Legal aid 592

Burns, Mr Simon
Questions
Incapacity benefit, Social security appeals 729w
Independent Tribunal Service, Finance 729w
Lone parents, Income support 604-5w
New deal for lone parents 224w, 730-1w
Non-departmental public bodies, Scottish Office 165-8w
Vacancies, Chelmsford 228w

Burstow, Mr Paul
Questions
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, Ear disorders 542w
Disabled workers 339w

***Burstow, Mr Paul**—continued*
Hospital discharges 578-9w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 392-3w
Jobclubs, Sutton 502-3w
Local government staff, Inner London boroughs 299-300w
Mentally disadvantaged, Administration of justice 568w
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority, Finance 579-80w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 61w, 161w
Personal income, Pensioners 37-8w
Psychiatric nurses, Community health services 370w
Rate arrears, Inner London boroughs 299-300w
Respite care 124w

Bus services
Flintshire 312w
Pension funds 294-5w
Scotland 587-8w

Buses
Handicapped 421w

Business motions
(06.04.98) 131, (24.04.98) 1151

Business premises
Valuation 428w

Business questions
971-8

Business statements
(20.04.98) 501-2, 969-71

Butane gas
Solvent abuse 265-6w, 576w

Bye laws
420w

***Byers, Mr Stephen**, Minister for School Standards, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Secondary education, Wiltshire (22.04.98) 945-8
Questions
Education action zones 225w
Educational finance, Essex 684-5w
Educational finance, Travelling people 591-4w
Educational policy, Publicity 336w
Educational publications, Finance 335w
Educational standards 331-4w
Grant maintained schools, Educational standards 340-3w
Literacy 227-8w, 660w, 723w
Literacy Task Force 660w
Primary education, Finance 225w
School closures, Staffordshire 501-2w
Schools, Inspections 227w
Teachers, Pay settlements 661w

Bypasses
Ashby de la Zouch (08.04.98) 284-7

Cabinet committees
Millennium compliance 72w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 717-9
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 553-4
Questions
Animal feed, Antibiotics 79-80w
Drug abuse, Health education 170-1w
EC economic policy 351
Economic and monetary union 961

***Cable, Mr Vincent**—continued*
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Prison education services 261w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Suicide 511-2w
London Underground, Investment 6w
London Underground, Performance standards 6w
Young offender institutions 706w
Young offenders, Prisoners on remand 705-6w

***Caborn, Mr Richard**, Minister for the Regions Regeneration and Planning, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Questions
Housing construction, Kingston upon Thames 11w
Housing construction, Planning permission 307-8w
Regional development agencies, Civil servants 144w
Regional development agencies, Public appointments 286w
Regional development agencies, Recruitment 423w
Structure plans, Nottinghamshire 144-5w
Tesco, Planning permission 301w
Urban Task Force 297-8w

Cairngorms
Railway transport 110w, 720w

Calor Gas
Gas tariffs 155w

Campbell, Alastair
(24.04.98) 1152-60

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 371

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 983, 1009-17, 1020-1
Questions
Aircraft carriers, Defence procurement 4
Iraq, Arms trade 163w
Israel, Armed forces deployment 141
Microbiology, Disease control 733-4w
UN finances 201-2w

Campbell-Savours, Mr Dale
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 604, 608-9
Oral question time intervention (20.04.98) 468
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 29, 49-50
Questions
Economic policy 949
Inheritance tax 252-3w
Inheritance tax, Public access 251-2w
Iraq 198-9w
Iraq, Foreign trade 156
Millennium compliance, Consultants 349w
Radioactive waste disposal 825-6

Canada
Cattle 214w
Upholder class submarines 56w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 704
Questions
NHS trusts, Scotland 581
Radioactive wastes 824-5

Cancer
see also Breast cancer, cervical cancer

Cancer
Medical treatments 817-8

Cann, Mr Jamie
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1007-9

Capital gains tax
245w, 399w
Personal equity plans 244-5w

Capital punishment
Military law 694w

Caplin, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 83
Questions
Financial Services Authority 151-3w, 631-2w
Football, Arrests 558-9w
Local government, Ethics 1[illegible]-1w
Piers, Brighton 463

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 428-9w, 584-5w

Cardigan Bay
Nature conservation 807

Caribbean
Drug crimes 409w

Cars
Prices 357-8w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 696, 701, 708, 710
Questions
EC enlargement 152
European Commission 89w, 205w
Foreign policy, Ethics 71-2w, 89w

Cash ratios
402w

Caton, Mr Martin
Questions
Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency, Performance standards 274-5w
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, Performance standards 274w
Homelessness, Wales 654w

Cattle
Canada 214w

Cattle tracing system
486-7w

Cellular phones
Northern Ireland 433w
Radiation 433w

Central Asia
Radioactive materials 645w

Central Europe
Poverty 410w

Central Railway
287-8w

Central Science Laboratory
214-7w, 235w
Financial targets 572w
Income 214w
Institute of Food Research 235-6w
Legal costs 492w
Relocation of employees 232w

Ceramic industries
Export promotion 149

Cervical cancer
Death 505-6w

***Cervical cancer**—continued*
Screening 125w, 505w, 614-5w
Women 505-6w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (22.04.98) 890, 896, 900, 911
Conduct of proceedings (22.04.98) 892, 905, 915-6, 919, 925

Challenger tanks
556-7w

Chamber of Commerce (Protection of Title) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for Com read (24.04.98) 1147

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Absenteeism 73-4w
Compliance cost assessments 633w
Publications 633w

Channel tunnel
Fire services 287w
Railway freight transport 348
Railway network 143w, 287-8w, (08.04.98) 296-8, 422w
Railway safety 287w

Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass
Road construction 549-50w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 364
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 192-5

Chapman, Sir Sydney,
Debates etc.
Cyprus (08.04.98) 292-4
Questions
Church Commissioners, Annual reports 163-4w
Syrian Arab Republic, Ministers' visits abroad 198w

Charitable donations
Food surpluses 83w

Charities
Non-domestic rates 8w

Chartermark scheme
569w

Chatham Dockyard
Radiation hazards 50w

Chaytor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 739-42
Questions
Beef, Exports 337-8
Food surpluses, Charitable donations 83w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 563-4w
Radioactive waste disposal 827

Chechnya
Hostages 396w

Chelmsford
Vacancies 228w

Chemical and biological warfare
International cooperation 693-4w, 714-5w
Iraq 12-3, 153, 156
Persian Gulf 12

Chemical weapons
Police equipment 262w

Chidgey, Mr David
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 50-4

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Fund
507w

Child care tax credit
35w, 242-3w, 398-9w, 619w

Child Support Agency
132w, 376-7w
Administrative delays 374w
Complaints 374-5w
Performance standards 130-1w
Postal services 131-2w

Child workers
International Labour Organisation 225w

Children
Advertising controls 230w
Legal aid 610w
Maintenance 129-30w, 132-3w, 374-6w
Northern Ireland 269w
Overseas aid 414-5w
Passports 173w
Prescription drugs 613-4w
Tobacco 267w

Children in care
Wales 101w, 207w

Children's Nurseries (Safety) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (22.04.98) 830-2

China
Exports 150
Prisoners 88w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm,
Questions
"Working Together for a Healthier Scotland Consultation Paper" 581w

Chlamydiosis
(08.04.98) 269-70

Cholesterol
Medical treatments 197-8w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1077, 1111-8
Questions
Disability appeal tribunals 137-8w
Public transport, Expenditure 653w

Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust
Public appointments 125w

Christianity
Millennium Exhibition 474-5
Religious freedom 88-9w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
Edinburgh 456-7w

Church Commissioners
Accountability 446w
Annual reports 163-4w
Investment 475-6
Public appointments 446-9w
Westminster Abbey 445w

Church of England
Human rights 534w

Church property
Access to countryside 445w

Circuses
Animal welfare 260w

Citizens' First initiative
204-5w

City of Durham
Skill shortages 501w

Civic dignitaries
Election expenses 427w
Greater London 427w

Civil Aviation Authority
Inspections 291-3w

Civil defence
Expenditure 532-3w

Civil proceedings
591-2
Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 514w

Civil rights
Prisoners 516w

Civil servants
Prime Minister 675w
Regional development agencies 144w
Wales 211w

Civil service
Codes of practice 70w
Developing countries 409-10w

Civil service agencies
Dept of Social Security 134-5w
Efficiency scrutinies 310w
Relocation of employees 144w

Civil service manpower
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 1w

Civil service recruitment
Higher civil servants 674w
Northern Ireland Office 179w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 51, 64, 66-9
Questions
Middle East, EC aid 199w

Clappison, Mr James
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 443-8
Questions
Air Training Corps 50w
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) 1997/98 513w
Home detention curfews 261-2w
Intimidation of witnesses 677w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 139-40
Passports, Families 520w
Political refugees 707w
Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group 703w
Young offenders, Prison population 512w
Young offenders, Secure accommodation 634w

Clark, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 980, 982-3, 986, 1009, 1013
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 814-5

***Clark, Rt Hon Dr David**, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster*
Questions
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Compliance cost assessments 633w
Civil service agencies, Efficiency scrutinies 310w
Contracts for services, Codes of practice 310w
Government departments, Inquiries 688-90w
Health insurance 536w

Clark, Rt Hon Dr David*—*continued
Market research 536w
Non-departmental public bodies, Performance standards 153-4w
Open government 73w, 309w

Clark, Dr Lynda
Debates etc
Registered Establishments (Scotland) Bill, 1R (22.04.98) 829

Clark, Dr Michael
Questions
Petrol additives, Standards specifications 160w

Clarke, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 915
Questions
Central Science Laboratory 214-7w
Central Science Laboratory, Financial targets 572w
Central Science Laboratory, Income 214w
Central Science Laboratory, Legal costs 492w
Central Science Laboratory, Relocation of employees 232w
Commonwealth Business Council 687w
Economic and monetary union 961-2
Food, Research 128w, 217-8w, 232-4w, 354-5w
Public sector borrowing requirement 696w
Serbia, Arms embargoes 687-8w

Clarke, Mr Eric
Questions
Economic situation, Asia 816

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 600
Questions
National Lottery 399w

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom, Minister for Film and Tourism, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Conferences, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 683-4w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport, Computers 566w
Drama, Income 466-7
Film distribution 461-2
Film industry 451w
Film industry, Investment 467
Film industry, Tax allowances 467
Football 450w
Piers, Brighton 463
Piers, National Lottery 463
Piers, North West region 33w
Royal parks, Cycleways 451w
Tourism 451-2w
Tourism, Income 34w
Tourism, Sustainable development 451w
Tourist information 566-7w

Class sizes
331w

Cleft palate
575-6w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 981, 989, 1001, 1011, 1028-32, 1035-6, 1041, 1046, 1061
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 386
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 625-7, 643, 659, 675-8, 682

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey*—*continued
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1077
Questions
Computers, Northern Ireland Office 598-602w
Food Standards Agency 570-1w
Tesco, Planning permission 301w

Clothing
Armed forces 715-7w

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Arms trade, Indonesia 345-6w
Challenger tanks 556-7w
Church Commissioners, Investment 475-6
Debts, Developing countries 695w
Defence contracts, Offset arrangements 557w
Diplomatic service 396w
Electric shock equipment 644w
Health action zones, Wales 806
International Criminal Court 643-4w
Ministers' visits abroad, Singapore 556w
Newspaper press, Competition 511w
Northern Ireland government 344
Offset arrangements, Oman 558w, 711w
Project Al Yamamah, Offset arrangements 557-8w
Trade promotion 396w
War crimes, Iraq 13

Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust 691w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Questions
Criminal Cases Review Commission 177-8w
Debts, Developing countries 695w
Film industry 451w
Structure plans, Nottinghamshire 144-5w

Coal
Reviews 511w

Coal mining
Pension funds 67-8w, 357w
Respiratory diseases 359w

Coalfields Task Force
418-9w

Coastguard Agency
16w, 552w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Questions
Armed forces, Social class 50-1w
Computer privacy, Personal records 513w
Data Protection Bill (HL) 1997/98 262-3w
Day care of children 595w
Defence expenditure 6
King's Cross Station, Anthrax 301w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 231-2w
Nuclear disarmament 349-50
Police equipment, Chemical weapons 262w
Thai boxing, Finance 565w

Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (24.04.98) 1148

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1047-50
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 379, 382, 433-5
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 28, 35, 38-9, 45, 58, 69, 75

Collins, Mr Tim*—*continued
Questions
Gulf states, Armed forces deployment 153-4
Mass media, Ownership 467-8

Colman, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Public petitions (08.04.98) 452

Colombia
Overseas aid 18w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 109
Questions
Ethnic minorities, Government grants 18w

Commission for Racial Equality
Public appointments 702w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Common agricultural policy
80-1w, 201w, 217-8w
Wales 653w

Common fisheries policy
83w
Questionnaires 666w

Commonwealth Business Council
687w

Commonwealth Games
Manchester 33w

Community arts
Finance 463-4

Community Fire Safety Task Force
177w, 532w

Community health services
Psychiatric nurses 370w

Community hospitals
Closures 194-5w
Wales 209w

Community regeneration initiative special project
Northern Ireland 189-90w

Community relations
Belfast 180w

Community service orders
Young offenders 24w

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Company and Business Names (Chamber of Commerce Etc) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for Com read (24.04.98) 1147

Company management
358w

Competition
Air fares 345w
Local government services 288w
Newspaper press 511w
Post Office 562w

Competition Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
142w, 616w

Complaints against local government
Scotland 674w

Complaints against police
Northern Ireland 76w

Compliance cost assessments
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 633w

Computer fraud
438w

Computer privacy
Personal records 513w

Computers
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 566w
Northern Ireland Office 598-602w

Concessionary television licences
Pensioners 462-3

Conditional fee agreements
610w

Conditions of employment
Further education 662w
Higher education 662w
Young people 361w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 237-40
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 498
Questions
Day care of children, Northern Ireland 269w

Connex Rail
2w, 419w

Conservative Party
Northern Ireland 269w

Constitutions
Republic of Ireland 269w

Construction materials
Health hazards 611w
Road works 310-1w

Consultants
Crown Prosecution Service 438w
Millennium compliance 349w

Consumer education
645w
EC grants and loans 236w

Consumer protection
Building industry 15-6w
EC grants and loans 327w

Contraceptives
VAT 615w

Contracts
Customs and Excise 246w
Hospital consultants 734w
Millennium Exhibition 78-9w, 319w
UK Detention Services 517w

Contracts for services
Codes of practice 310w
Dept of Social Security 545-6w
Social Security Benefits Agency 606-7w

Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims
(21.04.98) 721-2

Conventional weapons
52w

Cook, Frank
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1008, 1023-7, 1036
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 931-2

Cook, Rt Hon Robin, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 143-4
EC enlargement 152
EC enlargement, Environment protection 153
EC enlargement, Human rights 152-3
Fishing vessels, Inspections 395w
Government Communications Headquarters, Relocation of employees 397w
Israel, Armed forces deployment 141
Israel, Peace negotiations 141-2
Kosovo 146
Kosovo, Armed conflict 145-6
Macedonia, Armed forces deployment 146
Middle East, EC external relations 140-1
Middle East, Ministers' visits abroad 142
Middle East, Peace negotiations 139-40, 142-3
Ministers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 395w
Syrian Arab Republic, Ministers' visits abroad 198w
Turkey 206w

Cooper, Ms Yvette
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 84, 88
Questions
Coal mining, Respiratory diseases 359w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Questions
Conventional weapons 52w
Cricket, Women 471
Swaziland, Overseas aid 680-2w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 731-6
Questions
European fighter aircraft, Costs 51w
Housing construction, Kingston upon Thames 11w
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, Government shareholding 561w
Nigeria, Human rights 154-5
Select committee reports, House of Commons debates 35w
Tree felling, Kingston upon Thames 26w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Parliamentary broadcasting, Points of order (07.04.98) 158
Recess motions (08.04.98) 304-7
Questions
Blair, Tony, Members' attendance 16

Cornton Vale Prison
586

Corporate plans
Millennium Exhibition 477

Cosmetic surgery
Private health services 425w

Cotter, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 114-7
Questions
Contracts for services, Codes of practice 310w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Private finance initiative 355w
Osteopathy 614w
Regional development agencies, Civil servants 144w

Cotter, Mr Brian—continued
Smuggling, Industry 399-400w
Tobacco, Retail trade 267w

Cotton
Antidumping duties (08.04.98) 275-7

Council house rents
5w, 707w
Wales 102w

Council house sales
Alyn and Deeside 314w
Coventry 12w

Council housing
Scotland 583w

Council of Mortgage Lenders
Codes of practice 149w

Council tax
613w
Derbyshire (08.04.98) 270-2
Discounts 652w
Oxfordshire 813-4
Scotland 585-6w
Wales 652w

Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1998
Debates etc.
(07.04.98) 261

Counselling
Post traumatic stress disorder 372w

Counterfeit manufacturing
Aircraft equipment 291w

Countryside
Public petitions (06.04.98) 132, (07.04.98) 261, (24.04.98) 1073

Countryside Commission
Public appointments 8w

Court Service
Operating costs 567w
Welsh language 406w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 541, 544, 550-3
Questions
Family credit, Owner occupied housing 41w
Social security reform 965

Coventry
Council house sales 12w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Asbestos, EC external trade 156w
Child Support Agency, Complaints 374-5w
Disability living allowance, Social security appeals 382w
Handicapped 339w

Cran, Mr James
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 96-8
Questions
Beef, Northern Ireland 338

Cranston, Mr Ross
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 984
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 514
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 640-4, 646, 651-2
Questions
Animal welfare, Research 469-70w
Legal costs, Insurance 567w
Millennium Exhibition 452w
Museums and galleries, Dudley 465

Cranston, Mr Ross—continued
Welfare to work 959-60

Crausby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 431-3
Questions
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) 1997/98 171w
Youth offending teams 24w, 171-2w

Credit unions
962-3

Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia
196w, 365-7w
Annual reports 615-6w

Cricket
470-1
National Lottery 657w
Scotland 471
Women 471

Crime
Music 266w
Unemployment 522-3w

Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R and Money res* (08.04.98) 370-452
Questions
24w, 171w, 513w, 531-2w, 585

Crime prevention
Social problems 531-2w

Crime (Sentences) Act 1997
Questions
24-5w, 532w

Crimes against the person
Homosexuality 617w, 636-8w, 702w
Northern Ireland 702w
Scotland 617w

Criminal appeals
26-7w

Criminal Cases Review Commission
177-8w

Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988
Questions
648-9w

Criminal investigation
266w

Criminal Procedure (Intermediate Diets) (Scotland) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (08.04.98) 364

Criminal proceedings
Armed forces 54-5w
Birmingham 320w
Scotland 576-7
Tax evasion 230-1w

Crisis loans
728w

Croatia
Repatriation 147

Crown Committee
see Prescribing Supply and Administration of Medicines Review Team

Crown Prosecution Service
Consultants 438w

Croydon
Transport 345

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Questions
Social security benefits overpayment 127-9w

Cryer, Mr John
Debates etc.
Road safety (08.04.98) 298-300

Cultural heritage
EC grants and loans 327w

Culture
National income 139w

Cummings, Mr John
Questions
Derelict land 290w
Disability living allowance, Seaham 639w
Incapacity benefit, Seaham 222-3w
Incapacity benefit, Social security appeals 605-6w
Pupil exclusions, Easington 497w
Skill shortages, City of Durham 501w
Skill shortages, Seaham 589w

Cunningham, Jack,
Questions
Beef Bones Regulations 1997, Judgments 717-8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Devon 673w
Cattle tracing system 486-7w
EC Agriculture Council 212w, 667w
Official engagements, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 470-86w
Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group 234-5w
Untreated milk, Retail trade 673w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Questions
Council house sales, Coventry 12w
Educational aid 17w
NHS, New deal schemes 371w
Passive smoking, Health education 371w
Private finance initiative 243w
Pupil exclusions 343-4w
Pupil exclusions, West Midlands 344w
Recycling 301-2w
Road tolls, Private finance initiative 11-2w
Road tolls, Urban areas 145w
Sites of special scientific interest 12w
Smoking, Public places 371w
Smoking, Women 370w
Working families tax credit 398w, 619w

Cunningham, Ms Roseanna
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 377
Social Fund, Tayside (07.04.98) 262-6
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 238-9w
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 576-7
Customs and Excise, Contracts 246w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 825

Curriculum
Music education 502w
Wales 711w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 804-5

Custodial treatment
Wales 530w
Women 530w

Customs and Excise
Contracts 246w

Cycleways
Royal parks 451w

Cycling
Road accidents 298w

Cyprus
(08.04.98) 292-4
EC accession 143
Peace negotiations 143-4

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Debates etc.
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 742-4
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1074-8, 1088, 1090-1, 1105
Questions
Advertising controls, Children 230w
Advertising Standards Authority 358w
Farmers, Early retirement 664w
Health, Poverty 691w
Health action zones, Wales 691w
Millennium Exhibition 566w
National Assembly of Wales 651w
Pre-school education, Welsh language 444w
Social services, Elderly 691-2w
Toys and games, Safety standards 358-9w

Dairy farming
347
Wales 442w, 656-7w

Dairy products
Imports 656w
Wales 656w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
British Museum (Lindisfarne Gospels) Bill, 1R (08.04.98) 368-9
Crown Office for Scotland, Points of order (21.04.98) 595
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 112
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 362-3
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 497
Questions
Animal quarantine 83w
Anthrax 143w, 347
Explosives 12w
Iraq, Water supply 155-6
Lockerbie, Bombings 579
Scotland Bill 1997/98, Legislative drafting 588
Sheep, Prices 492w

Darling, Mr Alistair, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 508-11, 521
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 599-610, 614
Questions
Bank of England, Interest rates 966-7
Bank of England Act 1998 701w
Budget, Official publications 253-4w
Cash ratios 402w
Earned income 618w
Exchange rates 967-8
Marginal tax rates, Families 964-5
MI5, Disclosure of information 247w
Museums and galleries, Admission charges 41w
National Lottery 399w
Public expenditure 38-40w
Public sector borrowing requirement 696w
Social security reform 965
Tax burden, Families 965-6
Taxation, Town and country planning 698w

Darvill, Mr Keith
Questions
Winter fuel payments 697w

Data banks
Sexual offences 704w

Data Protection Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (20.04.98) 529-35
Questions
262-3w, 513w

Data Protection Registrar
Pay (24.04.98) 1151

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 517-9
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 644-50, 685
Questions
Economic and monetary union 956
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 391-2w
Immigrant detainees 173-4w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Questions
Debts, Developing countries 695w
Immigration, Advisory services 174-5w
Licensed premises, Glasgow 588w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
Dyfed Powys Health Authority, Public appointments 441w

Davies, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 87, 90, 104
Questions
Business questions 973
Transport, Croydon 345
Unemployment 957

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 602, 614, 627-31
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 492-3
Questions
Crisis loans 728w

Davies, Rt Hon Ron, Secretary of State for Wales
Questions
Adult education, Welsh language 209w
Agriculture, Wales 804-6
Beef, Wales 805
Civil servants, Wales 211w
Development agencies, Wales 809-10
Film industry, Wales 691w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 653w
Meirionnydd 318w
National Assembly of Wales 651-2w
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 440w
National Lottery, Cricket 657w
National Orchestra of Wales, Finance 657w
Nature conservation, Wales 105w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 442w
Public appointments, Wales 315w, 444-5w
Sports facilities, Wales 102w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Finance 440w, 713-4w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Offices 441w

Davies, Rt Hon Ron—continued
Welsh Office, Flags 102-3w
Welsh Office, Offices 440-1w

Davis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 397-400
Questions
Criminal proceedings, Birmingham 320w

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1089, 1116

Day care of children
595w
Lone parents 584w
Northern Ireland 269w
Scotland 584w
Tax allowances 623w
Wales 443w, 652w

Dean, Mrs Janet
Questions
British Telecom, Broadcasting 671-2w
Lottery distributors, West Midlands 468-9

Death
Army in Northern Ireland 462-5w
Breast cancer 505w
Cervical cancer 505-6w
Drug abuse 272w, 316-7w
Fires 672w
Hospital patients 683w
Refugees 412w
Road accidents 372w

Debts
Developing countries 695-6w, 963-4
Students 658w, 685-6w

Defence
Malaysia 3-4

Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency
Performance standards 274w

Defence contracts
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 276-7w
Offset arrangements 557w
Remploy 716w
Textiles 716w

Defence equipment
Export licensing 345-6w

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
10-1
Administrative costs 277-8w
Defence contracts 276-7w
Firing ranges 715w
Ministry of Defence Police 52w
Publications 553-6w

Defence expenditure
2-3, 6

Defence Export Services Organisation
279-80w

Defence industries
Diversification 10

Defence land
Armed forces training 46w
Land pollution 283w, 467w

Defence Postal and Courier Services
Performance standards 275w

Defence procurement
5-6, 8-9, 50w
Aircraft carriers 4
Armoured fighting vehicles 649-50w

Defence research
6, 279w

Defence research—continued
Agent 15 650w

Defence support agencies
Departmental publications 280-1w

Defence Transport and Movements Executive
Performance standards 275-6w

Dematera, Sarah
720-1w

Democracy
Kenya 325w
Nigeria 154, 201w

Demonstrations
Northern Ireland 273w, 601w

Denham, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Crisis loans 728w
Disability living allowance 604w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 133w, 387-8w, 642-3w, 731w
Disability living allowance, Seaham 639w
Disability living allowance, Social security appeals 640w
Disability living allowance, Surveys 542-3w
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board 134w
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, Ear disorders 542w
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, Research 133w
Handicap benefits, Elderly 542w
Handicap benefits, Multiple sclerosis 537w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 384-5w, 391-3w
Incapacity benefit, Social security recipients 731w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 385w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 541w
National insurance contributions 377-8w, 543-4w
National insurance contributions, Personal pensions 604w
National Insurance Fund 686-7w
Pension Provision Group 536-7w
Pensions, Family resources survey 541w
Pensions Education Working Group 539-40w
Pensions review 731w
Retirement pensions, British residents abroad 604w
Retirement pensions, Expenditure 385-6w
Retirement pensions, National insurance contributions 377w
Retirement pensions, Social security recipients 386-7w
Social security abuse 543w
Social security abuse, Hackney 392w
Social security benefits overpayment 127-9w
Social security benefits rules, Vaccine damaged children 382-3w
Social security payments, Automation 133w
War pensions, Nuclear weapons tests 544w
Winter fuel payments, Publicity 727-8w
Winter fuel payments, Social security benefits overpayment 379-82w
Winter fuel payments, Sunderland 641-2w
Winter fuel payments, Take-up 379w

Departmental circulars
Police 635w

Departmental coordination
Export licensing 346w
Overseas aid 679-80w

Departmental correspondence
Fisheries 665w

Departmental forms
Disability working allowance 641w

Departmental publications
Army Technical Support Agency 468-70w
Atomic Weapons Establishment 552w
Defence support agencies 280-1w
HM Inspectorate of Prisons 256w
Home Office 28-32w
Labour market 630w
Land pollution 670w
Lone parents 224w

Departmental responsibilities
Human rights 722w

Deportation
Nigeria 154

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Computers 566w
Conferences 683-4w

Dept for Education and Employment
Scotland 340w

Dept for the Environment Transport and the Regions
see Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions

Dept of Health
Energy consumption 191w
Information technology 127-8w

Dept of Social Security
Advertising 729-30w
Civil service agencies 134-5w
Contracts for services 545-6w

Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Annual reports 147w
Civil service manpower 1w
Official hospitality 1w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Alternative energy 352w
Ministers' visits abroad 64w
Private finance initiative 355w
Transport policy 59w

Deputy Prime Minister
Ministerial duties 69w

Derbyshire
Council tax (08.04.98) 270-2
Income tax 696w
Local government finance (08.04.98) 280-2

Deregulation of Racecourses Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
(21.04.98) 596-8

Deregulation Select Committee
(20.04.98) 536

Derelict land
290w
Housing construction 291-2w
Planning permission 418w
Tipping of waste 9w

Developing countries
Civil service 409-10w
Debts 695-6w, 963-4

Developing countries trade
Bananas 492w

Development agencies
Wales 809-10

Development aid
Economic and monetary union 414w

Development Board for Rural Wales
Welsh Development Agency 809

Development land tax
425w

Deviance and behaviour disorders
Prisoners on remand 677-8w

Devon
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 673w

Devonport Dockyard
Repairs and maintenance 282w

***Dewar, Rt Hon Donald**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 577-8
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 576-7
Environment Agencies Legislation Review 240-1w
Grampian Police 577-9
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 580
Land ownership and tenure, Scottish Office 164-5w
Local government reform, Ethics 674w
NHS trusts, Scotland 579-81
Non-departmental public bodies, Scottish Office 165-8w
Primary health care, Scotland 581-2
Public expenditure, Scotland 454-6w
Scottish Office, Millennium compliance 584w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 165-6w

Diabetes
Driving 547-8w
Road accidents 547w

Dibden Bay
(23.04.98) 1064-72

Diesel fuel
Scotland 582w

Digital broadcasting
BBC 563w
British Sky Broadcasting 563w
Public service broadcasting 565w

Diplomatic relations
397w
Israel 150

Diplomatic service
396w
Entry clearances 90-1w
Private education 321-5w

Dir91/439/EEC
548w

Dir93/42/EEC
615w

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions

Disability appeal tribunals
137-8w

Disability living allowance
604w, 699w
Benefit integrity project 133w, 387-8w, 642-3w, 731w
Disabled person's tax credit 245w
Peterlee 639w
Seaham 639w
Social security appeals 382w, 640w
Surveys 542-3w

Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board
134w
Ear disorders 542w
Research 133w

Disability Rights Commission
686w

Disability Rights Task Force
Public appointments 595-6w

Disability working allowance
Departmental forms 641w

Disabled person's tax credit
Disability living allowance 245w

Disabled workers
339w

Disciplinary proceedings
Merseyside Police 531w

Disease control
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 81w, 212-3w, 218w, 577-8, 816-7
Bovine tuberculosis 210w, 570w, 646-7w
Microbiology 733-4w

Diseases
Scotland 170w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 442-3
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 34, 62
Questions
Berlin airlift, Festivals and special occasions 14
Civil proceedings 591-2
Medical records, Fees and charges 190-1w

Dobbin, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
National House Building Council (22.04.98) 792, 795

***Dobson, Rt Hon Frank**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority, Ministerial statements (08.04.98) 353-64
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Annual reports 615-6w

Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996
Questions
289w

Domestic electrical appliances
Recycling 67w

Domestic violence
Prosecutions 259w
West Midlands 21w, 259w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 580
Scotland, Dept for Education and Employment 340w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 606-7w

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 22-31, 36
Questions
Educational publications, Finance 335w

Dorset
Agriculture (20.04.98) 563-74

Dounreay
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 721w, 821-6

Dounreay—continued
Radioactive wastes 511w, 720w, 818

Drama
Income 466-7

Dredging
Harwich 666w

Drew, Mr David
Questions
Genetically modified organisms, EC action 82w
Southern Africa, EC external trade 89-90w

Driving
Diabetes 547-8w

Driving instruction
Northern Ireland 75w
Police training 638w

Driving licences
EC law 548w
Motorcycles 293w
Northern Ireland 190w

Driving offences
Motor insurance 18-9w

Driving Standards Agency
Performance standards 670-2w

Drug abuse
Death 272w, 316-7w
Gwynedd 312w
Health education 170-1w, 207-8w
Northern Ireland 271-2w, 646w
Prisoners 531w
Scotland 113w, 459w
Wales 207-8w, 315-7w

Drug crimes
Caribbean 409w
Gwynedd 25-6w
Luton 346
Prison population 257-8w, 705w
Prison sentences 24-5w

Dudley
Museums and galleries 465

Duncan, Mr Alan
Questions
Market research, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 79w
Pay, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 86-7w
Pay, Northern Ireland Office 431w

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Questions
Child care tax credit 35w
Dept of Social Security, Advertising 729-30w
Incapacity benefit, Social security appeals 728w
Incapacity benefit, Social security recipients 731w
New deal for lone parents 730w
Winter fuel payments, Publicity 727-8w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
BBC, Parliamentary broadcasting (08.04.98) 272-5
Questions
Aircraft equipment, Counterfeit manufacturing 291w
Arms exports, Export licensing 6-7
Business questions 971-2
Channel tunnel, Fire services 287w
Channel tunnel, Railway safety 287w
Civil Aviation Authority, Inspections 291-3w
Federal Aviation Administration, Inspections 284w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth—continued
Motor industry, Foreign investment in UK 160w
Music education 464
Train operating units, Subsidies 292w, 430w

Duty free allowances
697w, 955

Dyfed Powys Health Authority
Public appointments 441w

Dyslexia
336w

***Eagle, Angela**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Waste Minimisation Bill, Rep and 3R adjourned (24.04.98) 1145-6
Questions
Acid rain 13w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 428-9w
Civil service agencies, Relocation of employees 144w
Coalfields Task Force 418-9w
Cosmetic surgery, Private health services 425w
Countryside Commission, Public appointments 8w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Civil service manpower 1w
Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 289w
Explosives 12w
Flood control, Greater London 424-5w
Housing construction, Derelict land 291-2w
Incinerators 296w
Industrial health and safety, EC law 13w
Inland waterways 419-20w
Land pollution, Departmental publications 670w
Landfill tax 9-10w
Lead, Paint 551-2w
Limestone, Environment protection 303-4w
Local government staff, Working conditions 302-3w
Millennium Exhibition, Land pollution 294w
Millennium Exhibition, Pollution control 4-5w
Mink 425w
National parks 424w
Noise control 295w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units 419w
Official hospitality, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 1w
Packaging, Wastes 306w
Recycling 301-2w
Recycling, Plastics 143-4w
Regional development agencies 549w
Reprography, Industrial health and safety 304-5w
Rights of way, Handicapped 302w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 303w
Sites of special scientific interest 12w
Tipping of waste, Derelict land 9w
Tipping of waste, Pollution monitoring 416-7w
Waste disposal, North West region 416w, 547w, 669w
Waste management, Staffordshire 9w
Water supply, Lead 13w

Eagle, Maria
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 359
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 26, 47, 59, 73
Questions
Shipping accidents, Inquiries 415-6w

Ear disorders
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board 542w
Young people 369w

Early excellence centres
92w

Early retirement
Farmers 664w

Early years development plans
Finance 344w

Earned income
618w

Earnings rules
Housing benefits 135w

Easington
Pupil exclusions 497w

East Kent Health Authority
Extra contractual referrals 367w

East London line
707w

Eastern Europe
Poverty 410w
Radioactive materials 645w

EC accession
Cyprus 143

EC action
Energy (06.04.98) 131
Genetically modified organisms 82w
Information services (21.04.98) 722
Millennium compliance 349w
Sports 142w

EC Agriculture Council
212w, 667w

EC aid
238w, 414w
Disclosure of information 633-4w
Environmental impact assessment 236-7w
Middle East 199w

EC budget
632w

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC common foreign and security policy
87-8w, 199w

EC Cons Doc 13289/97
(21.04.98) 722

EC countries
Public sector borrowing requirement 696w
Unemployment 956

EC economic policy
351

EC enlargement
152
Animal welfare 153
Environment protection 153
Human rights 152-3

EC external relations
Middle East 140-1

EC external trade
Asbestos 156w
Southern Africa 89-90w

EC Finance Council
953-4

EC grants and loans
162-3w, 217-8w, 328-30w, 355-6w
Alyn and Deeside 314w
Consumer education 236w
Consumer protection 327w
Cultural heritage 327w
EC integration 202-4w
Education 328w
Fisheries 663-4w
Gwent Tertiary College 93-8w, 445w, 692w
Information services 202-5w
Journalists in Europe 203w
Training 327-8w
Wales 313w, 652w, 654w, 802-4
Young people 328w
Youth organisations 202-3w

EC integration
EC grants and loans 202-4w

EC Internal Market Council
360-1w

EC Labour and Social Affairs Council
596-7w

EC law
Art works 508-10w
Driving licences 548w
Fire prevention 255w
Industrial health and safety 13w
Passenger ships 582w
Waste disposal 296w
Youth employment 361w

Economic and monetary union
148w, 149, (21.04.98) 696-719, 814, 949-50, 954, 956-7, 961-2, 966
Belgium 955
Development aid 414w
Exchange rates 631w

Economic forecasting
623w

Economic policy
949
Scotland 583w

Economic situation
352
Asia 816

Edinburgh
Chronic fatigue syndrome 456-7w

Education
EC grants and loans 328w
Essex (08.04.98) 301-3
Museums and galleries 451w

Education action zones
225w

Education and industry
348-9w

Educational aid
17w

Educational finance
350, 812-4
Essex 351-2, 684-5w
National insurance contributions 228w
Scotland 581w
Travelling people 314-5w, 591-4w

Educational institutions
Finance 660w

Educational policy
Publicity 336w

Educational psychology
Pupil-teacher ratios 498-500w

Educational publications
Finance 335w

Educational qualifications
Higher education 335-6w

Educational standards
331-4w, 500w, 723w
Grant maintained schools 340-3w
Special schools 494w
Wales 574w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Gwent (08.04.98) 322-5
Questions
Armed forces women, Equal opportunities 49w
Beef, Wales 805
Local government finance, Wales 211w
NHS trusts, Gwent 653w

Efficiency scrutinies
Civil service agencies 310w

Elderly
Handicap benefits 542w
Prescription drugs 371-2w
Social services 691-2w

Election administration
Northern Ireland 342-3

Election expenses
Civic dignitaries 427w

Electric shock equipment
644w
Members' correspondence 330w

Electricity generation
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 146w

Electricity interconnectors
Northern Ireland 271-2w

Electricity supply industry
510w

Electroconvulsive Therapy (Restrictions on Use) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Electronic funds transfer
150w

Electronic government
(06.04.98) 133-8

Electronic mail
345w
Schools 494w

Electronic voting
House of Commons voting methods 18-20, 395w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 357
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 288w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Liverpool 520w
Training and enterprise councils, Expenditure 660w
Training and enterprise councils, North West region 660-1w

Emergency planning
524-9w

Emergency services
Millennium compliance 582-3
Scotland 582-3

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Orchestras, Bournemouth (08.04.98) 278-9

Employment
Equal opportunities 268w, 335-6
Northern Ireland 268w, 335-6

Employment agencies
Ex gratia payments 709w

Employment discrimination
Handicapped 339w

Employment opportunities
Working families tax credit 35-6w

Employment policy
686w
Scotland 583-4w

Employment Rights Act 1996
Questions
Ex gratia payments 563w

Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (08.04.98) 364

Employment Service
Information technology 226w
New deal schemes 337w

Empty housing
Belfast 180w

Energy
EC action (06.04.98) 131

Energy Conservation (Housing) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R order read (24.04.98) 1147

Energy consumption
Dept of Health 191w

Energy Efficiency Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (24.04.98) 1147

Energy Efficiency (Information) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Energy policy
Environment protection (22.04.98) 731-51

Energy prices
Northern Ireland 188-9w

Energy research
Expenditure 354w

Energy resources
162w

English Local Government Staff Commission
see Local Government Staff Commission England

English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting
370w

Entertainment licensing
533w

Entry clearances
Diplomatic service 90-1w

Environment Act 1995
Questions
670w

Environment Agencies Legislation Review
240-1w, 306-7w

Environment protection
EC enlargement 153
Energy policy (22.04.98) 731-51
Genetically modified organisms 10w, 285-6w

***Environment protection**—continued*
Limestone 303-4w
Procurement 69-70w
Scottish Development Agency 461w
Scottish Enterprise 461w

Environmental health
Glasgow 575
Interagency cooperation 367w

Environmental impact assessment
EC aid 236-7w
Extractive industries 163w
Town and country planning 423w

Environmental policy
Budget 38w, 245w, 624w

Environmental Task Force
429-31w
Stoke on Trent 337w
Wales 444w

Equal opportunities
Armed forces women 49w
Employment 268w, 335-6

Equal Opportunities Commission
335w

Essex
Education (08.04.98) 301-3
Educational finance 351-2, 684-5w
School transport (08.04.98) 277-8

Essex and Suffolk Water
Bungay (08.04.98) 290-2

Etherington, Bill
Questions
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Annual reports 147w
General practitioners, Sunderland 364-5w
Hospital waiting lists, Sunderland 732w
Local government finance 145-6w
Poultry, Animal welfare 662-3w, 719w
Winter fuel payments, Sunderland 641-2w

Ethics
Foreign policy 71-2w, 89w, 198w
Local government 10-1w
Local government reform 674w

Ethnic minorities
Armed forces recruitment 45-6w
Government grants 18w
Non-departmental public bodies 442w
Police 519w, 635w

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council
256-7w

Euro
150w, 954

Europe
Postal rates 710w

European Central Bank
954-5, 962

European Commission
89w, 205w
Information services 87w

European Communities
Schools 333-4w

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993
Debates etc.
(21.04.98) 696-719

European fighter aircraft
Costs 51w

European Investment Bank
Loans 622w

European Legislation Select Committee
(20.04.98) 536

European Night Services
Finance 422-3w

European Women's Lobby
203w

European Youth Forum
204w

Eurostar
Birmingham 422w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Questions
Health, Wales 801-2
Nature conservation, Wales 105w
Property development, Llanrwst 104-5w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Questions
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Civil service manpower 1w
EC grants and loans 355-6w

Ex gratia payments
Employment agencies 709w
Employment Rights Act 1996 563w

Exchange rates
63w, 245w, 694w, 698w, 951-3, 967-8
Agriculture 951-2
Bank of England 695w
Economic and monetary union 631w
Exports 348w
Foreign investment in UK 348w

Explosives
12w

Export Control Organisation
Performance standards 60-1w

Export credit guarantees
64-5w, 159w
Human rights 65w

Export Forum Working Group
510-1w

Export licensing
59-60w
Administrative delays 59w
Arms exports 5-7, 149-50, 346-7w, 508w
Defence equipment 345-6w
Departmental coordination 346w

Export of live animals
Animal welfare 665w
Pigs 488-90w
Sheep 488-90w

Export Opportunities (Defence and Security) Service
279-80w

Export promotion
148-9, 199w
Ceramic industries 149
Training and enterprise councils 501w

Exports
351w
Beef 337-8
China 150
Exchange rates 348w
India 351w

Exservicemen
Complaints 53-4w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 47-8w
Nuclear weapons tests 466w

Extra contractual referrals
East Kent Health Authority 367w

Extractive industries
Environmental impact assessment 163w
Hazardous wastes 356w
Life insurance 356w

Faber, Mr David
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 149-50
Export Control Organisation, Performance standards 60-1w
Export licensing 59-60w
Export licensing, Departmental coordination 346w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 359
Questions
Bank of England, Interest rates 966-7
Film industry, Tax allowances 467
Interest rates 348
Millennium Exhibition, Building workers 320w
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 473-4
National Assembly of Wales 652w
Tourism, Northern Ireland 268w

Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989
Questions
182w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 503-4, 508, 521-2, 527-8
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 646, 674, 678-82
Questions
European Central Bank 954-5

Families
Income support 269w
Marginal tax rates 964-5
Passports 520w
Tax burden 965-6

Family courts
Translation services 609w

Family credit
Free school meals 378w
Lone parents 539w
Owner occupied housing 41w
Welfare milk 378w

Family income
Budget March 1998 959

Family law
Law reform 567w

Family Law Act 1996
Questions
609-10w

Family planning
Wales 573w

Family resources survey
Pensions 541w

Farm incomes
Scotland 584

Farmers
Bankruptcy 83w, 103w
Early retirement 664w
Markets 85w
Suicide 311w
Wales 103w

Farming of Animals for Fur (Prohibition) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Fatchett, Mr Derek, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Afghanistan, Women 325-6w
Arms exports, Export licensing 149-50

Fatchett, Mr Derek—*continued*
Arts, Trade promotion 147-8
Bhutan, Refugees 90w
British Council 148
China, Exports 150
China, Prisoners 88w
Christianity, Religious freedom 88-9w
Dematera, Sarah 720-1w
Diplomatic service, Entry clearances 90-1w
Economic and monetary union 149
Electric shock equipment 644w
Export promotion 148-9, 199w
Export promotion, Ceramic industries 149
Gardening leave 687w
Gulf states, Armed forces deployment 153-4
Hong Kong, Legislation 722-3w
Indonesia 199w
International Criminal Court 643-4w
Iraq 198-9w
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 153, 156
Iraq, Foreign trade 156
Iraq, Water supply 155-6
Israel, Diplomatic relations 150
Israel, UN resolutions 87w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 721w
Middle East, EC aid 199w
Middle East, Ministers' visits abroad 151
Middle East, Peace negotiations 150-1, 199-200w
Nuclear weapons 644w
Official hospitality, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 321w
Palestinians 151-2
Trade promotion 396w

Fazakerley Prison
Private finance initiative 518w

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Hospital closures 118w
Attorney General, Theft 438-9w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport, Computers 566w
Home Office, Theft 263-5w
Motor insurance, Driving offences 18-9w
Motorcycles, Driving licences 293w
Museums and galleries, Theft 139w
National Lottery, Piers 463
Overseas aid, Tobacco industry 17-8w
Piers, North West region 33w
Sports facilities, Local government functions 33w
Theatres, North West region 33-4w
Tourism, Income 34w
Tourism, Northern Ireland 676-7w
Tourist information 566-7w

Federal Aviation Administration
Inspections 284w

Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
Prison education services 261w
Suicide 511-2w

Ferries
Scotland 582w

Festivals and special occasions
Air force 13-4
Berlin airlift 13-4
Israel 142w

Field, Rt Hon Frank, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Advertising 729-30w

Field, Rt Hon Frank—*continued*
Dept of Social Security, Civil service agencies 134-5w
Dept of Social Security, Contracts for services 545-6w
Maintenance, Children 130w
Social security, Market research 223-4w, 607-8w
Social security benefits 544w
Social security reform 605w
Social security reform, Local government functions 385w

Film distribution
461-2

Film industry
451w
Investment 467
Tax allowances 467
Wales 691w

Finance (No 2) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R (21.04.98) 599-694
Business questions (20.04.98) 479

Financial Services Authority
151-3w, 631-2w

Financial targets
Central Science Laboratory 572w

Fine defaulters
Television licences 518w

Finucane, Patrick
Homicide 648w

Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997
Questions
255w

Fire prevention
254-5w
EC law 255w

"Fire Safety Legislation for the Future Consultation Paper"
254-5w

Fire service pensions
533w

Fire services
Channel tunnel 287w
Manpower 534w
Scotland 457w

Firearms
514w
Compensation 19-20w, 514w
Northern Ireland 178w

Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997
Questions
19-21w
Civil proceedings 514w
Enforcement 19w

Firearms certificates
20-1w

Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981
Questions
178w

Fires
Death 672w

Fireworks
Retail trade 359-60w, 562-3w

Firing ranges
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 715w
Pendine 276w

First time buyers
Married people 71w

Fish farming
Scotland 107w, 167-70w

Fisher, Mr Mark, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Advertising controls, Children 230w
Arts finance, Greater London 464
BBC, Digital broadcasting 563w
BBC, Private companies 564w
Community arts, Finance 463-4
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 462-3
Cultural heritage, EC grants and loans 327w
Digital broadcasting, Public service broadcasting 565w
EC grants and loans 328-30w
Kaleidoscope scheme 326-7w
Museums and galleries, Education 451w
Museums and galleries, Government grants 449-50w
Museums and galleries, Theft 139w
Music education 464
National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts, Norwich 450w
Theatres, North West region 33-4w
UK Sports Institute 452w

Fisheries
Departmental correspondence 665w
EC grants and loans 663-4w
Scotland 572w
Working hours 572w

Fishing
Solway Firth 240w

Fishing limits
673w

Fishing quotas
665w

Fishing vessels
673w
Inspections 395w
Licensing 665-6w

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 704, 714
Questions
A13, Traffic noise 669-70w
National disability development initiative 338w
New deal for young unemployed 588-90w
Royal yacht 274w
Royal yacht, Repairs and maintenance 53w

Flags
Welsh Office 102-3w

Flexitime
627w

Flight, Mr Howard
Debates etc.
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 548-50
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 98, 108, 116
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1094, 1099-100, 1102
Questions
EC common foreign and security policy 87-8w
Fireworks, Retail trade 359-60w, 562-3w
Health authorities, Public appointments 614w
Primary health care 684w
Publications, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 633w

Flight, Mr Howard*—*continued
Students, Debts 685-6w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 406, 408
Questions
Working families tax credit 698w

Flintshire
Bus services 312w

Flood control
85w, 813
Greater London 424-5w

Fluoridation
117w
Scotland 575-6

Fly posting
Local authority powers 13-4w

Flynn, Paul
Questions
Animal experiments 513-4w
Baltic states, Foreign relations 201w
Cervical cancer, Death 505-6w
Cervical cancer, Screening 505w, 614-5w
Crime, Unemployment 522-3w
Drug abuse, Death 272w
Drug abuse, Northern Ireland 271w, 646w
Drug abuse, Scotland 459w
Drug abuse, Wales 315-7w
Gulf War syndrome 48-9w, 282-3w
National Insurance Fund 686-7w
Prescription drugs, Elderly 371-2w
Prison population 520-2w
Prison population, Drug crimes 257-8w
Prisons, Construction 258w
Prozac, Prescriptions 372w
Retirement pensions, National insurance contributions 377w

Food
Genetically modified organisms 82w
Research 128w, 217-8w, 232-4w, 354-5w

Food contamination
Pesticides 84w
Veterinary drugs 85-6w

Food Standards Agency
85w, 235w, 570-1w

"Food Standards Agency White Paper"
570-1w

Food surpluses
Charitable donations 83w

Football
450w
Arrests 558-9w

Football Sponsorship Levy Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (07.04.98) 159-61

Force Research Unit
281w

Forced labour
721-2w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
204w
Ministers 395w
Official hospitality 321w
Pay 86-7w

Foreign investment in UK
564w
Exchange rates 348w
Motor industry 160w
Northern Ireland 189w, 272w
Scotland 581w
Wales 314w, 653w

Foreign policy
Ethics 71-2w, 89w, 198w

Foreign relations
72w
Baltic states 201w

Foreign trade
Iraq 156

Forestry
Wales 442-3w

Forestry Commission
Wales 443w

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 863, 873-4
Questions
Election administration, Northern Ireland 343

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1074, 1081, 1083, 1088-94, 1107, 1109
Questions
Official residences 674-5w
Official visits, Members' partners 72w, 675w
Prime Minister, Civil servants 675w
Scottish Parliament 582-3w
Surveys, Lord Chancellor's Dept 609-10w
Surveys, Northern Ireland Office 432w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Questions
Environmental Task Force 429-31w
New deal for young unemployed 589w

Foster, Mr Don
Questions
Education action zones 225w
Grant maintained schools, Educational standards 340-3w
New deal schemes 501w

Foster, Mr Michael, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 27

Foulkes, Mr George, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 238-9w
Belarus, Overseas aid 239w
EC aid 238w
EC aid, Environmental impact assessment 236-7w
Know-how Fund 237w
Overseas aid 237w
South Africa, Trade agreements 237w
Southern Africa, Trade agreements 238w

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 698, 700, 709-14
Radioactive waste disposal, Points of order (21.04.98) 694-5
Questions
Primary health care, Scotland 581-2

Fraser, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 170, 215, 228, 233-7, 239
Questions
National Lottery, Finance 450w

Fraser, Mr Christopher*—*continued
Northern Ireland government 75-6w

Fraud
Law reform 176-7w
Motor vehicle testing 295-6w
Passports 517-8w

Free school meals
Family credit 378w

Fuels
NHS 194w, 366w
Tax harmonisation 400w

Further education
Conditions of employment 662w

Fyfe, Maria
Questions
Bananas, Developing countries trade 492w
Child care tax credit 398-9w
Employment, Equal opportunities 268w
Lone parents, Day care of children 584w
Lone parents, Departmental publications 224w

Gaelic language
Languages education 178w

Galbraith, Mr Sam, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Abortion, Scotland 582w
Accidents, Medical treatments 107w
Agency nurses, Scotland 114w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Edinburgh 456-7w
Diseases, Scotland 170w
Drug abuse, Scotland 113w, 459w
Emergency services, Millennium compliance 582-3
Environmental health, Glasgow 575
Fluoridation, Scotland 575-6
Hospital admissions, Scotland 110-2w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 113-4w
Museums and galleries, Scotland 455-6w
Nurses, Scotland 114-6w
Osteoporosis, Scotland 106-7w
Sports facilities, Scotland 462w
"Working Together for a Healthier Scotland Consultation Paper" 581w

Gale, Mr Roger
Questions
BBC, Digital broadcasting 563w
BBC, Private companies 564w
Digital broadcasting, Public service broadcasting 565w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 506w
Legal aid, Expenditure 404w
Millennium compliance 598w

Galloway, Mr George
Questions
Employment policy, Scotland 583-4w

Gaming
518-9w

Gaming Act 1968
Questions
518-9w

Gaming clubs
Overseas investment 41w

Gaming machines
27-8w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 881

Gardening leave
687w

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Questions
Armed forces recruitment, Ethnic minorities 45-6w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Countryside, Public petitions (07.04.98) 261
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 435-7
Members' conduct, Points of order (23.04.98) 978
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1127-33
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1075
Questions
Business questions 975
Exchange rates 953
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Ministerial policy advisors 589

Gas pipelines
162w

Gas tariffs
Calor Gas 155w

General Certificate of Secondary Education
494-8w

General practitioners
Sunderland 364-5w

Genetically modified organisms
EC action 82w
Environment protection 10w, 285-6w
Food 82w

Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 1992
Questions
285-6w

Geneva Conventions (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

George, Mr Andrew
Questions
Armed forces, Clothing 715-7w
Remploy, Defence contracts 716w

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 313

Germany
Armed forces deployment 1-3, 47w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Questions
Bhutan, Overseas aid 18w
Bhutan, Refugees 90w
Diplomatic service, Entry clearances 90-1w
Immigration officers 172-3w
Legal aid, Political refugees 590-1

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 504-6, 509, 526-7
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 600, 604-5, 660
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Contracts for services 545-6w
Disability living allowance 699w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 133w

Gibb, Mr Nick—continued
Disability living allowance, Surveys 542-3w
Exservicemen, Complaints 53-4w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 147-8w
Market research 536w
Millennium Exhibition 452-3w
National insurance contributions 243w, 543-4w
National Lottery, Finance 450w
Official residences 407w
Pay 402-3w
Social security, Market research 223-4w, 607-8w
Social security abuse 543w
Social security benefits 544w
Trade promotion 73w
Welfare to work 958
Working families tax credit 619w

Gibraltar
Low flying 397w
Migrant workers 326w
Ministerial duties 326w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
A47 (21.04.98) 724
Questions
Acid rain 13w
Common agricultural policy 80-1w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 196w, 365-7w
Extractive industries, Hazardous wastes 356w
Fish farming, Scotland 107w
Heart diseases 576w
Industrial health and safety, EC law 13w
Intervention stocks 217w
National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts, Norwich 450w
Offshore drilling, Sea pollution 154-6w
Organophosphates 84w
Pesticide residues, Research 84-5w
Pesticides, Costs 85w
Pesticides, Food contamination 84w
Pigs, Animal feed 83-4w
Pigs, Animal welfare 218w
Regional selective assistance 356w
Water supply, Lead 13w, 124-5w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Questions
Common agricultural policy 201w
Common fisheries policy 83w
Common fisheries policy, Questionnaires 666w
Fishing limits 673w
National income, Italy 561w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Debates etc.
Computer applications, Points of order (21.04.98) 595
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1124-8, 1133, 1136, 1139
Questions
British Standards Institution 159-60w
Cabinet committees, Millennium compliance 72w
Information technology, Dept of Health 127-8w
Information technology, Ministry of Defence 54w
Public utilities, Millennium compliance 349-50w
Small businesses, Millennium compliance 91-2w

Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 361

Glasgow
Environmental health 575
Licensed premises 588w
Secondary education 588w

Glynde
Railway accidents 417w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98)847-8, 858, 868-71, 904-6, 908
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 492
Questions
Asbestos, Imports 157w
Asbestos, Manufactured goods 156-8w
Credit unions 962-3
Cricket, Scotland 471
Employment, Equal opportunities 335

Godsiff, Mr Roger
Questions
Retirement pensions, British residents abroad 604w

Goggins, Mr Paul
Questions
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 387-8w
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board 134w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Questions
Chartermark scheme 569w

Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Questions
Banking supervision 407-8w
Caribbean, Drug crimes 409w
Central Europe, Poverty 410w
Developing countries, Civil service 409-10w
Development aid, Economic and monetary union 414w
EC aid 238w, 414w
EC aid, Disclosure of information 633-4w
EC aid, Environmental impact assessment 236-7w
Know-how Fund 237w
Land ownership and tenure 411w
Overseas aid 237w, 408-11w
Overseas aid, Departmental coordination 679-80w
Poverty 408-9w, 678w
South Africa, Land ownership and tenure 409w
South Africa, Trade agreements 237w
Southern Africa, Trade agreements 238w
Sustainable development 678-9w
Waste disposal, North West region 416w, 547w, 669w
Zimbabwe, Land ownership and tenure 410w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 710
Questions
Northern Ireland government 269w
Organophosphates, Medical research 213w, 233-4w
Schools, European Communities 333-4w

Gorrie, Mr Donald
Questions
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Edinburgh 456-7w
Fire services, Scotland 457w

***Gorrie, Mr Donald**—continued*
Higher still development programme 457-8w
Vocational guidance, Scotland 587

Government Communications Headquarters
Relocation of employees 397w

Government contracts
Storage Equipment Manufacturers' Association 566w

Government departments
Inquiries 688-90w

Government grants to local authorities
Political refugees 118-9w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
506w

Government of Wales Bill 1997/98
Questions
651w

Government shareholding
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company 561w

Grammar schools
Northern Ireland 270w

Grampian Police
576-9, 586

Grant, Mr Bernie
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 246, 250
Questions
Prisoners, Restraint techniques 636w

Grant maintained schools
Educational standards 340-3w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 980, 1023, 1026-7, 1032-7, 1054, 1057, 1062
Beekeeping (22.04.98) 753, 755-6, 758-63, 767, 770-1
Secondary education, Wiltshire (22.04.98) 941-5
Questions
Health insurance 536w
Millennium Exhibition, Christianity 474-5
Ministry of Defence Police, Salisbury Plain 466-7w

Grazing land
Scotland 459-60w

Great Western Trains
Performance standards 707w

Greater London
Arts finance 464
Civic dignitaries 427w
Flood control 424-5w
Referendums 349, 426-7w
Taxi fares 307w
Theatres 230w
Training and enterprise councils 685w

Greater London Authority
Finance 146-7w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 390, 392, 425-7
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 164, 193, 207, 240-5
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 180-1, 1095-9, 1108
Questions
Exchange rates 952-3

***Green, Mr Damian**—continued*
Post Office Counters 711w

Greenbelt
Hertfordshire 352

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1003
Army bases, York (22.04.98) 776-7, 781
Town and country planning, Vale of York (22.04.98) 787

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 641, 676, 685
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 852, 917
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 500
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1094-6, 1122

Griffiths, Jane
Questions
Armed forces women, Equal opportunities 49w
Music education, Curriculum 502w

***Griffiths, Mr Nigel**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Advertising Standards Authority 358w
Cars, Prices 357-8w
Consumer education, EC grants and loans 236w
Consumer protection, EC grants and loans 327w
Domestic electrical appliances, Recycling 67w
Fireworks, Retail trade 359-60w, 562-3w
Toys and games, Safety standards 358-9w

***Griffiths, Mr Win**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office*
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Gwent (08.04.98) 323-5
Questions
Accidents, Medical treatments 104w
Agricultural subsidies, Wales 103w, 211w
Blood, Wales 573w
Blood donors, Wales 209w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 210w
Children in care, Wales 101w, 207w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 653w
Community hospitals, Wales 209w
Council house rents, Wales 102w
Council house sales, Alyn and Deeside 314w
Council tax, Discounts 652w
Dairy farming, Wales 442w, 656-7w
Dairy products, Imports 656w
Day care of children, Wales 443w, 652w
Drug abuse, Gwynedd 312w
Drug abuse, Health education 207-8w
Drug abuse, Wales 315-7w
Dyfed Powys Health Authority, Public appointments 441w
Environmental Task Force, Wales 444w
Family planning, Wales 573w
Farmers, Bankruptcy 103w
Forestry, Wales 442-3w
Forestry Commission, Wales 443w
Health, Poverty 691w
Health, Wales 801-2
Health action zones, Wales 691w, 806-7
Health services, Wales 657w
Homelessness, Wales 654w
Hospital beds, Wales 211w

***Griffiths, Mr Win**—continued*
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 801
Hospitals, Porthmadog 208-9w
Local government finance, Wales 211w, 655w
National Assembly of Wales 807
Nature conservation, Cardigan Bay 807
NHS, Social services 206w
NHS trusts, Blaenau Gwent 801
NHS trusts, Gwent 653w
NHS trusts, Wales 209-10w, 443w, 655w
Nurses, Wales 692w
Osteoporosis, Wales 104w, 212w
Out of town shopping centres, Wales 207w
Radioactive waste disposal, Wales 101-2w
Rural workers, Wales 656w
Second homes, Wales 104w
Sheep meat, Wales 655w
Slaughterhouses, Wales 211w
Social Exclusion Unit 439w
Social services, Elderly 691-2w
Suicide, Farmers 311w
Tipping of waste, Complaints 311w
Tipping of waste, Wales 101w
Water authorities, Wales 209w
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust, Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust 691w

Grogan, Mr John
Debates etc.
Television, Sports (08.04.98) 294-6
Questions
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 33w

Guided weapons
283-4w

Gulf states
Armed forces deployment 12, 153-4

Gulf War syndrome
7-8, 48-9w, 282-3w, 650w

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Radioactive waste disposal, Points of order (21.04.98) 695
Questions
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 428-9w
Industry, Air pollution control 710-1w
Millennium Exhibition, Contracts 78-9w, 319w
Millennium Exhibition, Safety standards 78w

Gunnell, Mr John
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 199-200w

Gwent
Health services (08.04.98) 319-25
NHS trusts (08.04.98) 319-25, 653w

Gwent Tertiary College
654w
EC grants and loans 93-8w, 445w, 692w

Gwynedd
Drug abuse 312w
Drug crimes 25-6w

Hackney
Social security abuse 392w
Tax evasion 624w

Hague, Rt Hon William,
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 816-7
Northern Ireland government 811

***Hain, Mr Peter**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office*
Questions
A550, Road traffic control 313w
Advisory bodies, Wales 690w
Bus services, Flintshire 312w
Curriculum, Wales 711w
EC grants and loans, Alyn and Deeside 314w
EC grants and loans, Wales 313w, 652w, 654w, 802-4
Educational finance, Travelling people 314-5w
Educational standards, Wales 574w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 314w
Gwent Tertiary College 654w
Gwent Tertiary College, EC grants and loans 93-8w, 445w, 692w
Hospital education, Wales 572w
Information technology, Wales 311w
Iron and steel industry, Wales 310w
Literacy, Wales 712w
Local enterprise agencies, Wales 317-8w
Manufacturing industries, Wales 653w
Minimum wage, Wales 652-3w
New deal schemes, Wales 574w, 652w, 807-9
New deal schemes, Young offenders 439-40w
Post offices, Wales 439w
Pre-school education, Welsh language 444w
Property development, Llanrwst 104-5w
Public transport, Expenditure 311-2w, 653w
Public transport, Rural areas 312w
Railway stations, Wrexham 573w
Railway transport, Wales 441-2w
Road safety, Wales 313w
Road traffic control, Wales 314w
Road works, Construction materials 310-1w
Roads, Wales 103-4w, 443w
School closures, Rural areas 97-100w
Special education, Wales 713w
Sports facilities, North Wales 572-3w
Sustainable development, Wales 689w
Tourism, Wales 712w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 124
Questions
Economic and monetary union 148w
Lloyd's of London 151w
Lloyd's of London, Balance of payments 249-50w
Road freight transport, Power industry 548-9w
Road works 610w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Questions
Arms exports, Annual reports 321w
Chechnya, Hostages 396w
China, Prisoners 88w
Guided weapons 283-4w
Indonesia 199w
London Underground, Passengers 6-7w
Russia, Overseas aid 411w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Electricity generation 146w
Vitamin B6 117w
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 234w

Handicap benefits
Elderly 542w
Multiple sclerosis 537w

Handicapped
339w
Buses 421w

***Handicapped**—continued*
Employment discrimination 339w
Industrial training 92w
Local government elections 258-9w
Northern Ireland 335
Public footpaths 293-4w
Public transport 421-2w
Railway stations 8-9w
Rights of way 302w
Underground railways 422w

Handicapped children
Respite care 195-6w

Hanson, Mr David
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 139-40
New deal schemes, Wales 652w, 808
Northern Ireland government 269w
Solvent abuse 34w
Solvent abuse, Butane gas 265-6w, 576w

Harris, Dr Evan
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 361
Questions
HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Departmental publications 256w

Harvey, Mr Nick
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 81w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units 419w
Regional development agencies 549w

Harwich
Dredging 666w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 372-3, 386, 396, 402-3, 408, 415-8
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 162, 165, 176, 194, 207, 224-8
Questions
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 462
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 143-4
Magistrates' courts, Closures 592-4
Public sector debt 697w

Hayes, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 717-8
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 68
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Lincolnshire 346

Hay-Plumb Task Force
see Coalfields Task Force

Hazardous wastes
Extractive industries 356w
Scotland 108-9w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 100
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 230
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 47
Questions
Greenbelt, Hertfordshire 352

Healey, Mr John
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Middle East 56-7w
EC grants and loans 163w
New deal for lone parents, Manpower 537-8w

***Healey, Mr John**—continued*
Upholder class submarines, Canada 56w

Health
Poverty 691w
Wales 691-2w, 801-2

Health action zones
Wales 691w, 806-7

Health aid
Refugees 411-4w

Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974
Questions
551w

Health authorities
Public appointments 614w

Health education
Drug abuse 170-1w, 207-8w
Passive smoking 371w

Health hazards
Construction materials 611w

Health insurance
536w

Health service staff
578w

Health services
577w
Age discrimination 506-7w
Expenditure 684w
Gwent (08.04.98) 319-25
Wales 657w

Heart diseases
576w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 403-4
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 740
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 673-5
Questions
Arms trade 198w
Business questions 976-7

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David,
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 511-5
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 610-6
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 119-23, 126
Questions
Betting and gaming duties 246-7w
Economic and monetary union 956-7
Inheritance tax 400w
National insurance contributions 147w
NHS, Fuels 194w, 366w
Winter fuel payments, Social security benefits overpayment 381-2w

Heathrow Airport
Public petitions (08.04.98) 452

Hedges and ditches
Scotland 461w

***Henderson, Mr Doug**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Baltic states, Foreign relations 201w
Citizens' First initiative 204-5w
Common agricultural policy 201w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 721w, 821-6
Eastern Europe, Radioactive materials 645w

Henderson, Mr Doug—continued
EC common foreign and security policy 87-8w, 199w
EC grants and loans, Information services 202-5w
EC grants and loans, Youth organisations 202-3w
EC integration, EC grants and loans 202-4w
European Commission 89w, 205w
European Commission, Information services 87w
European Women's Lobby 203w
European Youth Forum 204w
Foreign policy, Ethics 89w
Gibraltar, Low flying 397w
Gibraltar, Migrant workers 326w
Gibraltar, Ministerial duties 326w
Journalists in Europe, EC grants and loans 203w
Koschnick, Hans 205w
Our Europe Association 202w
Radioactive waste disposal 825-7
Radioactive wastes 824-5
Radioactive wastes, Scotland 824
Serbia, Arms embargoes 687-8w
South Africa, Trade agreements 397w
Southern Africa, EC external trade 89-90w

Henderson, Mr Ivan
Questions
Educational finance, Essex 684-5w

Heppell, Mr John
Questions
Fire prevention 254-5w
Fire prevention, EC law 255w
Police powers, Abandoned cars 523-4w

Herbs and spices
VAT 623-4w

Heritage Lottery Fund
Inland waterways 565w
Tourism 565-6w

Hertfordshire
Greenbelt 352

Hexham
New deal schemes 339w

Higher civil servants
Civil service recruitment 674w

Higher education
Conditions of employment 662w
Educational qualifications 335-6w
Finance 662w

Higher education admission
335-6w
Scotland 169-70w
Social class 334w

Higher still development programme
457-8w

Highways Act 1980
Questions
549-50w

Highways Agency
Performance standards 14-5w

Hill, Mr Keith
Questions
London Underground 611-2w
Nigeria, Democracy 154

Hill livestock allowances
571w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Questions
Child Support Agency 132w
Child Support Agency, Performance standards 130-1w

Hinchliffe, Mr David—continued
Child Support Agency, Postal services 131-2w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 721w
Fly posting, Local authority powers 13-4w
Maintenance, Children 132-3w
Residential care, Inspections 115-6w
Social services, Inspections 116w

Hip replacements
Wales 574-5w

Historic buildings
Inheritance tax 618-9w

HM Inspectorate of Prisons
Departmental publications 256w

HM Land Registry
see Land Registry

HMS Dreadnought
Radiation hazards 468w

HMS Illustrious
Persian Gulf 11

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Questions
Jubilee line 2-4w

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 494
Questions
Construction materials, Health hazards 611w
Fires, Death 672w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Business questions (20.04.98) 502
Ministerial statements, Points of order (07.04.98) 157, (22.04.98) 828
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 835-7, 841, 849, 852, 856-7
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 491
Questions
Middle East, Ministers' visits abroad 142
Radioactive wastes, Scotland 824

Holiday accommodation
Millennium Exhibition 318-9w

Holiday leave
352

Home Buying Process Ministerial Task group
see Ministerial Task Group on the Home Buying Process

Home detention curfews
261-2w

Home Grown Cereals Authority
571w

Home Office
Departmental publications 28-32w
Public expenditure 260w
Theft 263-5w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Questions
Yugoslavia, Peace negotiations 146-7

Home Zones Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Homelessness
Wales 654w

Homeworking
627-8w

Homicide
Finucane, Patrick 648w
Prison population 257-8w

Homosexuality
Crimes against the person 617w, 636-8w, 702w
Self defence 636w

Hong Kong
Legislation 722-3w

Hoon, Mr Geoffrey, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Debates etc.
Legal Aid Board (08.04.98) 329-34
Questions
Civil proceedings 591-2
Conditional fee agreements 610w
Court Service, Operating costs 567w
Court Service, Welsh language 406w
Criminal proceedings, Birmingham 320w
Family courts, Translation services 609w
Family law, Law reform 567w
Immigration Appeal Tribunal, Administrative delays 589-90
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 567-8w
Judiciary, Public appointments 405-6w
Judiciary, Training 404-5w, 609w
Land Registry, Weymouth 568w
Legal aid 592
Legal aid, Expenditure 404w
Legal aid, Personal injury compensation 610w
Legal aid, Political refugees 590-1
Legal aid, Trade unions 568w
Legal costs, Insurance 567w
Lockerbie, Bombings 588
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Ministerial policy advisors 589
Magistrates' courts, Closures 592-4
Mentally disadvantaged, Administration of justice 568w
Official hospitality, Lord Chancellor's Dept 320w
Scotland Bill 1997/98, Legislative drafting 588
Scottish Parliament, Women 588-9
Surveys, Lord Chancellor's Dept 609-10w

Hope, Mr Phil
Questions
Minimum wage, Northern Ireland 270w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 348

Horse racing
(21.04.98) 596-8

Hospital admissions
Scotland 110-2w

Hospital beds
368w
North Thames Regional Health Authority 367-8w
Wales 211w

Hospital closures
Accident and emergency departments 118w
Maternity services 118w

Hospital consultants
Contracts 734w
Pay incentives 197w, 577w

Hospital discharges
578-9w

Hospital education
Wales 572w

Hospital patients
Death 683w

Hospital waiting lists
126w, 364w
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust 580-1w
Scotland 113-4w, 580
Special hospitals 125-6w
Sunderland 732w
Wales 801

Hospitals
Parking 615w
Porthmadog 208-9w

Hostages
Chechnya 396w

House of Commons debates
Select committee reports 35w

House of Commons procedure
Speaker's rulings and statements (24.04.98) 1150

House of Commons reform of procedure
18

House of Commons times of sittings
15-6

House of Commons voting methods
Electronic voting 18-20, 395w

House of Lords reform
145

Housing benefits
135w
Earnings rules 135w
Expenditure 383-4w
London boroughs 391-2w
Political refugees 394w
Social security abuse 384-5w, 391-3w
Social security reform 383w

Housing construction
Derelict land 291-2w
Kingston upon Thames 11w
Northern Ireland 178w
Planning permission 307-8w
Regional planning and development 424w

Housing Corporation
Rents 708w

Housing standards
294w

Hovercraft
(21.04.98) 721-2

Hovercraft (Application of Enactments) (Amendment) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(21.04.98) 721-2

Hovercraft (Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims) (Amendment) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(21.04.98) 721-2

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Export licensing, Points of order (07.04.98) 157
Ministerial statements, Points of order (22.04.98) 828
Questions
Kosovo 146
Middle East, Peace negotiations 142-3

***Howarth, Mr Alan**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Day care of children 595w
Disability Rights Commission 686w
Disability Rights Task Force, Public appointments 595-6w
Disabled workers 339w
Early years development plans, Finance 344w
Employment Service, Information technology 226w
Equal Opportunities Commission 335w
Handicapped 339w
Jobclubs, New deal schemes 226w
Jobclubs, Sutton 502-3w
Jobseeker's allowance, Mature students 661w
National disability development initiative 338w
Scotland, Dept for Education and Employment 340w
Students, Social security benefits rules 685w
Supported employment programme 493w
Vacancies, Chelmsford 228w
Welfare to work, Pilot schemes 337-8w

***Howarth, Mr George**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 534
Questions
Absent voting, Fees and charges 519w
Animal experiments 513-4w, 559-61w
Animal experiments, Primates 26w
Animal welfare, Circuses 260w
Birds of prey, Nature conservation 266w
Boundary Commission for Wales, Public appointments 635w
British Horseracing Board 176w
Civil defence, Expenditure 532-3w
Community Fire Safety Task Force 177w, 532w
Computer privacy, Personal records 513w
Data Protection Bill (HL) 1997/98 262-3w
Drug abuse, Health education 170-1w
Drug crimes, Gwynedd 25-6w
Drug crimes, Prison sentences 24-5w
Emergency planning 524-9w
Entertainment licensing 533w
Fire prevention 254-5w
Fire prevention, EC law 255w
Fire service pensions 533w
Fire services, Manpower 534w
Fires, Death 672w
Gaming 518-9w
Gaming machines 27-8w
Polling stations, Access to buildings 258-9w
Prison population, Drug crimes 257-8w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 531w
Prisoners on remand, Deviance and behaviour disorders 677-8w
Solvent abuse, Butane gas 265-6w
Voting behaviour, Young people 531w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 980, 984, 1006, 1008-9, 1033, 1037-43
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 543-4, 554-8
Questions
Criminal appeals 26-7w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 10-1
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 581w

Howarth Task Force
see Disability Rights Task Force

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Education, EC grants and loans 328w
Educational finance, National insurance contributions 228w
Educational institutions, Finance 660w
Educational standards 723w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 494-8w
Higher education, Conditions of employment 662w
Higher education, Finance 662w
Higher education admission 335-6w
Higher education admission, Social class 334w
Industrial training, Handicapped 92w
Mature students, Income support 659w
Mature students, Student grants 657-9w
Millennium compliance 598w
Schools, Electronic mail 494w
Schools, European Communities 333-4w
Skill shortages, City of Durham 501w
Skill shortages, Seaham 589w
Skills Task Force, Public appointments 723-4w
Small businesses, Millennium compliance 91-2w
Student grants, Married people 658w
Student loans 597w
Students, Debts 658w, 685-6w
Teachers' pensions 661-2w
Training and enterprise councils, Expenditure 660w
Training and enterprise councils, Export promotion 501w
Training and enterprise councils, Greater London 685w
Training and enterprise councils, North West region 660-1w
Universities, Scotland 658w
Young people, EC grants and loans 328w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Debates etc.
Children's Nurseries (Safety) Bill, 1R (22.04.98) 830-2
Questions
Aircraft carriers 4
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust, Public appointments 125w
Independent Tribunal Service 382w

Hughes, Ms Beverley
Questions
English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting 370w
Internet Watch Foundation 175-6w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 357-8
Questions
Church Commissioners, Investment 476
Contraceptives, VAT 615w
Cricket 470-1
Crimes against the person, Homosexuality 617w, 636–8w, 702w
Educational finance 350
Health services, Age discrimination 506-7w
Health services, Expenditure 684w
Health services, Wales 657w
Homosexuality, Self defence 636w
Hospital consultants, Contracts 734w
Hospitals, Parking 615w

Human embryo experiments
364w

Human rights
Church of England 534w
Departmental responsibilities 722w
EC enlargement 152-3
Export credit guarantees 65w
Kenya 395-6w
Nigeria 154-5
Northern Ireland 438w

Human Rights Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
534w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 210-2
Questions
Theatres, Greater London 230w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 486-7

Humphries Task Force
see Skills Task Force

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 920-1
Questions
Community relations, Belfast 180w
Empty housing, Belfast 180w
Northern Ireland government 338-40
Public sector housing, Northern Ireland 180w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
School transport, Essex (08.04.98) 277-8

Hutton, Mr John
Questions
Defence industries, Diversification 10
Environment Agencies Legislation Review 306-7w
Welfare to work 958

Hydrocarbon oil duties
147-8w, 957-8
Rural areas 149-50w

Hydrographic Office
Operating costs 52-4w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Questions
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 642-3w
Employment, Equal opportunities 268w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 337

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 537-48, 560-2
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 200w

Immigrant detainees
173-4w

Immigration
Advisory services 174-5w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
Liverpool 520w

Immigration Appeal Tribunal
Administrative delays 589-90

Immigration applications
Administrative delays 520w, 535-6w

Immigration (Carriers Liability) Act 1987
Questions
255-6w

Immigration controls
255-6w

Immigration officers
172-3w

Immigration rules
31-2w

Immunology
Medical research 117w

Imports
Asbestos 157w
Dairy products 656w
Meat 490-2w

Incapacity benefit
Bolton 642-3w
Peterlee 222-3w
Seaham 222-3w
Social security appeals 382w, 605-6w, 728-9w
Social security recipients 731w

Incinerators
296w

Income support
540-1w
Families 269w
Lone parents 539w, 604-5w
Mature students 659w
Political refugees 134w
Social security benefits disqualification 391w
Take-up 136w

Income tax
400-2w
Derbyshire 696w
Pensioners 150w

Independent Tribunal Service
382w
Finance 729w

India
Exports 351w
Nuclear non proliferation 397-8w

Individual savings accounts
Tax allowances 244w
Tax yields 244w

Indonesia
199w
Arms trade 345-6w
Overseas aid 411w

Industrial diseases
Asbestos 191-2w
Compensation (08.04.98) 287-9

Industrial disputes
Prison Officers' Association 561w

Industrial health and safety
Building regulations 551w
EC law 13w
Reprography 304-5w

Industrial injuries disablement benefit
385w

Industrial research
Land pollution 709-10w

Industrial training
Handicapped 92w

Industry
Air pollution control 710-1w
Smuggling 399-400w

Inflation
699-701w
Retail prices index 699-700w

Information
Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales 289w

Information officers
Prime Minister (24.04.98) 1152-60

Information services
EC action (21.04.98) 722
EC grants and loans 202-5w
European Commission 87w

Information technology
Dept of Health 127-8w
Employment Service 226w
Ministry of Defence 54w
Wales 311w

***Ingram, Mr Adam**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 905
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Proscribed organisations 272w
Average earnings, Northern Ireland 179w
British-Irish Interparliamentary Body, Ulster Unionists 341
Community relations, Belfast 180w
Complaints against police, Northern Ireland 76w
Crimes against the person, Homosexuality 702w
Demonstrations, Northern Ireland 601w
Drug abuse, Northern Ireland 646w
Election administration, Northern Ireland 342-3
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 271-2w
Energy prices, Northern Ireland 188-9w
Finucane, Patrick, Homicide 648w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 178w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 189w, 272w
Juries, Northern Ireland 649w
Legal profession, Northern Ireland 647w
Maze Prison, Prison discipline 435w
Maze Prison, Security 267-8w
Mediation Network for Northern Ireland 434w
Minimum wage, Northern Ireland 179-80w, 270w
Northern Ireland Assembly 268w
Northern Ireland government 269w, 338-42
Northern Ireland Life Sentence Review Board 183w
Northern Ireland Life Sentence Review Board, Public appointments 182w
Parades Commission, Public appointments 188w
Personal records, Northern Ireland 601-2w
Police interrogation, Northern Ireland 648w
Police training, Northern Ireland 647w
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 182w, 436w
Public interest, Administration of justice 602w
Right of silence, Northern Ireland 648-9w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 341, 434w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Codes of practice 435w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Performance standards 181w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Personal records 602-3w
Seagate, Northern Ireland 645-6w
Security, Northern Ireland 343-4

Ingram, Mr Adam*—*continued
Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry 601-2w
Sinn Fein 341-2
Small businesses, Northern Ireland 268w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 74w
Tourism, Northern Ireland 268w, 676-7w
Weapons, Proscribed organisations 702w
Women, Northern Ireland 181w

Inheritance tax
252-3w, 400w
Art works 251-2w
Historic buildings 618-9w
Public access 251-2w

Inland Revenue
Manpower 700w
Millennium compliance 150w, 621-3w

Inland waterways
419-20w
Heritage Lottery Fund 565w
Repairs and maintenance 565w

Inner London boroughs
Local government staff 299-300w
Rate arrears 299-300w
Rent arrears 299-300w

Innovation
Agriculture 81-2w

Institute of Food Research
352-3w
Central Science Laboratory 235-6w

Institute of Legal Executives Order 1998
Debates etc.
(20.04.98) 535-6

Insurance
Jobseeker's allowance 136-7w, 540w
Legal costs 567w

Integrated administration and control system
Scotland 108w

Intelligence services
Disclosure of information 567-8w

Interagency cooperation
Environmental health 367w

Intercountry adoption
363w

Interdepartmental Working Group on Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses
see Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group

Interest rates
348, 957
Bank of England 966-7
Sterling 952

International cooperation
Chemical and biological warfare 693-4w, 714-5w
Millennium compliance 406w

International Criminal Court
326w, 643-4w

International Labour Organisation
Child workers 225w

International trade
Internet 347-8w

Internet
International trade 347-8w

Internet Watch Foundation
175-6w

Intervention stocks
217w

Intimidation of witnesses
677w

Iraq
198-9w
Arms trade 163w
Chemical and biological warfare 12-3, 153, 156
Foreign trade 156
War crimes 13
Water supply 155-6

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Exservicemen 47-8w

Iron and steel industry
Wales 310w

Israel
Armed forces deployment 141
Diplomatic relations 150
Festivals and special occasions 142w
Ministers' visits abroad 150
Occupied territories 139-40
Peace negotiations 141-2
UN resolutions 87w

Italy
National income 561w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Beef Bones Regulations 1997, Judgments 717-8w
Business questions 975-6
Fisheries, Working hours 572w
Official engagements, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 470-86w
Untreated milk, Retail trade 673w

Jackson, Ms Glenda, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Debates etc.
A47 (21.04.98) 727-30
Dibden Bay (23.04.98) 1067-72
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1118-23
Questions
A13, Traffic noise 669-70w
A380, Road construction 550w
Air safety 284w
Aircraft equipment, Counterfeit manufacturing 291w
British Transport Police 305w
Bus services, Pension funds 294-5w
Buses, Handicapped 421w
Channel tunnel, Fire services 287w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 143w, 287-8w, 422w
Channel tunnel, Railway safety 287w
Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass, Road construction 549-50w
Civil Aviation Authority, Inspections 291-3w
Coastguard Agency 16w, 552w
Connex Rail 2w, 419w
Driving, Diabetes 547-8w
Driving Standards Agency, Performance standards 670-2w
East London line 707w
European Night Services, Finance 422-3w
Eurostar, Birmingham 422w
Federal Aviation Administration, Inspections 284w
Great Western Trains, Performance standards 707w
Highways Agency, Performance standards 14-5w
Jet skis, Safety measures 286-7w
Jubilee line 2-4w
King's Cross Station, Anthrax 301w
Lifeboats, Liverpool 426w

Jackson, M. Glenda*—*continued
London Underground, Advertising 289w
London Underground, Finance 289w
London Underground, Investment 6w
London Underground, Passengers 6-7w
London Underground, Performance standards 6w
M25, Road works 550w
Merchant Shipping Working Group 424w
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 417-8w
Motor vehicle registration 143w
Motor vehicle registration, Fees and charges 289w
Motor vehicle testing, Fraud 295-6w
Motorcycles, Driving licences 293w
Motorway service areas, Solihull 296w
Parking, Schools 421w
Piracy 285w
Public footpaths, Handicapped 293-4w
Public transport, Expenditure 288w
Public transport, Handicapped 421-2w
Public transport, Rural areas 302w
Railway accidents, Glynde 417w
Railway freight transport 10w
Railway stations, Handicapped 8-9w
Rear seat belts 611w
Referendums, Greater London 426-7w
Road accidents, Cycling 298w
Road accidents, Diabetes 547w
Road accidents, Pedestrians 297-300w
Road construction, Leicester 427-8w
Road freight transport, Power industry 548-9w
Road tax, Tax yields 550-1w
Road tolls, Private finance initiative 11-2w
Road tolls, Urban areas 145w
Road works 7-8w, 610w
Shipping accidents, Inquiries 415-6w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Electricity generation 146w
Taxi fares, Greater London 307w
Train operating units, Subsidies 292w, 430w
Transport of radioactive materials 426w
Underground railways, Handicapped 422w

Jackson, Helen
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Annual reports 615-6w
Highways Agency, Performance standards 14-5w
Low flying, Sheffield 222w
Sports, EC action 142w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Questions
Community hospitals, Closures 194-5w

Japan
Radioactive waste disposal 66-7w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 697-8, 711, 719
Questions
Dredging, Harwich 666w
Economic and monetary union 966
Farm incomes, Scotland 584
Winter fuel payments, Social security benefits overpayment 379-80w

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Millennium Commission, Staffordshire 34w

Jet skis
Safety measures 286-7w

Jobcentres
Repairs and maintenance 589-91w

Jobclubs
New deal schemes 226w
Sutton 502-3w

Jobseeker's allowance
540-1w
Insurance 136-7w, 540w
Mature students 661w

Johnson, Mr Alan
Questions
Housing construction, Planning permission 307-8w

Johnson, Miss Melanie
Questions
Lead, Paint 551-2w, 575w

Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 314
Questions
Ballistic missile defence 9
Students, Debts 658w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 92
Questions
A550, Road traffic control 313w
Bank of England, Exchange rates 695w
Bus services, Flintshire 312w
Council house sales, Alyn and Deeside 314w
Dairy farming, Wales 442w, 656-7w
Dairy products, Imports 656w
EC grants and loans, Alyn and Deeside 314w
Exchange rates 953
Film industry, Wales 691w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 314w
Iron and steel industry, Wales 310w
Local enterprise agencies, Wales 317-8w
Manufacturing industries, Wales 653w
National Lottery, Cricket 657w
National Orchestra of Wales, Finance 657w
New deal schemes, Young offenders 439-40w
NHS, Social services 206w
NHS trusts, Wales 209-10w
Official engagements 651w
Post offices, Wales 439w
Public transport, Rural areas 312w
Railway transport, Wales 441-2w
Road safety, Wales 313w
Road traffic control, Wales 314w
Roads, Wales 103-4w
Rural workers, Wales 656w
School closures, Rural areas 97-100w
Sheep meat, Wales 655w
Social Exclusion Unit 439w
Special education, Wales 713w
Territorial Army, Wales 445w
Tourism, Wales 712w
Water authorities, Wales 209w
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust, Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust 691w

Jones, Ms Fiona
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 435
Questions
Mustard gas 467w

Jones, Helen M
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 11
Cervical cancer, Screening 125w
Employment policy 686w
Museums and galleries, Education 451w

Jones, Helen M—continued
Prison population, Drug crimes 705w
Prisoners on remand, Deviance and behaviour disorders 677-8w
Runaway children 27w
Schools, Inspections 227w
Special hospitals, Hospital waiting lists 125-6w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Questions
EC grants and loans, Wales 652w, 802-3

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 373-4, 381-2, 392
Questions
Devonport Dockyard, Repairs and maintenance 282w
European Investment Bank, Loans 622w
Higher education admission 335-6w
Higher education admission, Social class 334w
Housing benefits, Expenditure 383-4w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 384-5w
National insurance contributions 377-8w
Population distribution 42-4w
Retirement pensions, Expenditure 385-6w
Retirement pensions, Social security recipients 386-7w
Working families tax credit 619w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
Abortion, Medical ethics 195w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 653w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 210w, 646-7w
Supermarkets, Closures 356w

Journalists in Europe
EC grants and loans 203w

Jowell, Ms Tessa, Minister for Public Health, Dept of Health
Questions
Abortion, Medical ethics 195w
Artificial insemination 118w
Breast cancer, Screening 369-70w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 196w, 365-7w
Energy consumption, Dept of Health 191w
Environmental health, Interagency cooperation 367w
Fluoridation 117w
Food, Research 128w
Human embryo experiments 364w
Immunology, Medical research 117w
London Lighthouse 362w
MMR vaccine 732-3w
Oral contraceptives, Prescription charges 731-2w
Osteopathy 614w
Osteoporosis 122-3w
Passive smoking, Health education 371w
Smoking, Public places 371w
Smoking, Women 370w
Vitamin B6 117w
Water supply, Lead 124-5w

Jubilee line
2-4w

Judgments
Beef Bones Regulations 1997 717-8w
Tax evasion 230-1w

Judiciary
Public appointments 405-6w
Training 404-5w, 609w

Juries
Northern Ireland 649w

Justices of the Peace Act 1997
Questions
592

Kaleidoscope scheme
326-7w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 388-94
Ministerial statements, Points of order (22.04.98) 828
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 822-3
Israel, Peace negotiations 141-2
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 721w

Keeble, Ms Sally
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 449
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 676, 679
Questions
Budget March 1998, Family income 959
Community Fire Safety Task Force 177w
Flood control 813

Keen, Ann
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 43, 61-4

Keetch, Mr Paul
Questions
Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group 489-90w
Vitamin B6 81w
Welfare to work, Pilot schemes 337-8w

Kemp, Mr Fraser
Debates etc.
British Museum (Lindisfarne Gospels) Bill, 1R (08.04.98) 365-6
Questions
Criminal proceedings, Tax evasion 230-1w
Reprography, Industrial health and safety 304-5w

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Scotland 460-1w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 584-5w
Fish farming, Scotland 167-70w
Grazing land, Scotland 459-60w
Hedges and ditches, Scotland 461w
Millennium Commission, Tourism 565-6w
Museums and galleries, Scotland 455-6w
Public transport, Rural areas 302w
Rights of way, Handicapped 302w
School closures, Scotland 107-8w, 583w

Kenya
Democracy 325w
Human rights 395-6w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 996-1008, 1016
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 169
Questions
Aircraft carriers 5
Armed forces 467w
Business questions 976
Church Commissioners, Accountability 446w

Key, Mr Robert—continued
Church Commissioners, Public appointments 446-9w
Church Commissioners, Westminster Abbey 445w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 470w

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1017-8
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 606-7, 623-7
Questions
Dyslexia 336w
Eastern Europe, Radioactive materials 645w
EC Agriculture Council 667w
Firearms, Compensation 514w
First time buyers, Married people 71w
Housing benefits, Social security reform 383w
Public houses, Non-domestic rates 8w
Respite care, Handicapped children 195-6w
School closures, Staffordshire 501-2w
Social security reform, Local government functions 385w
Taxation, Town and country planning 698w
Town and country planning 419w
Witnesses 559w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of Public Service
Debates etc.
Electronic government (06.04.98) 135-8
Prime Minister, Information officers (24.04.98) 1156-60
Questions
Absenteeism, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 73-4w
Chartermark scheme 569w
Publications, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 633w

King, Ms Oona
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 87
Questions
Family credit, Welfare milk 378w

King, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 490
Questions
Organophosphates 491w

Kingham, Ms Tess
Debates etc.
National House Building Council (22.04.98) 797
Questions
Veterinary drugs, Food contamination 85-6w

King's Cross Station
Anthrax 301w

Kingston upon Thames
Housing construction 11w
Tree felling 26w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
Animal experiments 559-61w
Disability living allowance, Social security appeals 640w
EC Labour and Social Affairs Council 596-7w
Hazardous wastes, Scotland 108-9w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy—continued
Integrated administration and control system, Scotland 108w
Local education authorities, Scotland 585w
Pre-school education, Finance 585w
Social Exclusion Unit, Scotland 583-4

Know-how Fund
237w

Koschnick, Hans
205w

Kosovo
146
Armed conflict 145-6, 200-1w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Action 2000 350-1w
Educational policy, Publicity 336w
Museums and galleries, Government grants 449-50w

Labour force survey
250-1w

Labour market
Departmental publications 630w
Statistics 250-1w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Questions
East Kent Health Authority, Extra contractual referrals 367w
Educational standards 723w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 494-8w
Petrol, Prices 160w
Prescription charges 732w
Radioactive waste disposal 826-7
Regional selective assistance 344w

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Questions
Mass media, Ownership 450w
Petrol, Scotland 582w
Scottish Parliament, Women 588-9

Lait, Mrs Jacqui,
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 632-4, 684

Land ownership and tenure
411w
Scottish Office 164-5w
South Africa 409w
Zimbabwe 410w

Land pollution
Defence land 283w, 467w
Departmental publications 670w
Industrial research 709-10w
Millennium Exhibition 294w
Radioactive wastes 283w

Land Registers of Northern Ireland
Performance standards 77w

Land Registry
Weymouth 568w

Landfill tax
9-10w

Landlords
16w

Languages education
Gaelic language 178w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 83, 90-1, 93-4
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 359-60

Lansley, Mr Andrew—continued
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 167, 174, 215, 217, 221, 238-9, 241-3, 248
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 32, 35, 74
Questions
Development agencies, Wales 809
Firearms, Compensation 20w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Family law 567w
Fraud 176-7w

Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Questions
Bank of England Act 1998 701w
EC budget 632w
EC grants and loans, Wales 802
Public Analyst Services Review Group 672w
Tourism, Sustainable development 451w

Lawther Day Centre Belfast
433w

Laxton, Mr Bob
Questions
Civil service agencies, Relocation of employees 144w
Regional development agencies 346

Lead
Paint 551-2w, 575w
Water supply 13w, 124-5w

Lead in Paint (Health and Safety) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1148

Legal aid
592
Children 610w
Expenditure 404w
Personal injury compensation 610w
Political refugees 590-1
Trade unions 568w

Legal Aid Board
Atkinson, Stephanie (08.04.98) 326-34
Welsh language 406w

Legal costs
Central Science Laboratory 492w
Insurance 567w

Legal profession
(08.04.98) 303-4
Northern Ireland 647w
Police protection 647w

Legislative drafting
Scotland Bill 1997/98 588

Leicester
Road construction 427-8w

Leicestershire
Pupil exclusions 497-8w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 395, 420-3

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Connex Rail 2w, 419w
Inheritance tax, Historic buildings 618-9w

Leslie, Mr Christopher
Questions
Driving Standards Agency, Performance standards 670-2w

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Dorset (20.04.98) 563-74
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 508w
Arms trade, Indonesia 346w
Cars, Prices 357-8w
Cattle, Canada 214w
Dairy farming 347
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 731w
Flood control 85w
Foreign policy, Ethics 198w
Gaming machines 27-8w
Hospital waiting lists 126w
Income tax, Pensioners 150w
MMR vaccine 733w
Pensions review 731w
Prescription charges 126w
Railway transport, Cairngorms 110w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Disclosure of information 701w

Levitt, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 177, 213, 220-4
Questions
Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass, Road construction 549-50w
Dematera, Sarah 720-1w
Environmental health, Interagency cooperation 367w
Social security benefits rules, Vaccine damaged children 382-3w
Westminster Foundation for Democracy 144

Lewes Prison
Prison medical services 26w

Lewis, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 437-9

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 496
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 64-6, 76
Questions
Air force, Festivals and special occasions 13-4
Art works, EC law 508-10w
Lottery distributors 470
MI5 25w, 260w
MI5, Disclosure of information 247w
Middle East, Ministers' visits abroad 151
Nuclear weapons policy 349
Scottish Office, Millennium compliance 584w

Libraries
Ministry of Defence 55-6w

Licensed premises
Glasgow 588w

Licensing (Amendment) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (07.04.98) 158
2R order read (24.04.98) 1150

Liddell, Mrs Helen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 503, 506-8, 524-8
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 696-701, 706, 711

Liddell, Mrs Helen—continued
Questions
Abortion, Barnet 631w
Bank of England 632w
Banks, Northern Ireland 190w
Breast cancer 45w
Council of Mortgage Lenders, Codes of practice 149w
Credit unions 962-3
Debts, Developing countries 695-6w, 963-4
EC budget 632w
Economic and monetary union 148w, 961-2, 966
Economic and monetary union, Exchange rates 631w
Economic forecasting 623w
Electronic funds transfer 150w
Euro 150w
European Central Bank 962
European Investment Bank, Loans 622w
Exchange rates 245w, 698w
Financial Services Authority 151-3w, 631-2w
Flexitime 627w
Homeworking 627-8w
Inflation 699-701w
Labour market, Departmental publications 630w
Labour market, Statistics 250-1w
Lloyd's of London 151w
Lloyd's of London, Balance of payments 249-50w
Low pay 403w
Low pay, Young people 624-5w
Monetary Policy Committee 699w
National income, Italy 561w
Open ended investment companies 399w
Part-time employment 625-6w, 628-30w
Pay 402-3w
Personal pensions, Misrepresentation 247-50w
Personal savings 697w
Population, Age 561-2w
Population distribution 42-4w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Disclosure of information 701w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Public access 249w
Retail prices index, Inflation 699-700w
Teenage pregnancy, Perinatal mortality 251w
Teenage pregnancy, Wakefield 251w
UK contributions to EC budget 42w
Work sharing 629w
Working hours 626w

Life imprisonment
Prisoners' release 183w

Life insurance
Extractive industries 356w

Lifeboats
Liverpool 426w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 606
Questions
Personal savings 950

Limestone
Environment protection 303-4w

Lincolnshire
Agricultural subsidies 346

Literacy
227-8w, 660w, 723w
Wales 712w

Literacy Task Force
660w

Liverpool
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 520w
Lifeboats 426w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Questions
Agent 15, Defence research 650w
Chemical and biological warfare, International cooperation 693-4w, 714-5w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Publications 553-6w
Defence land, Land pollution 467w
Gulf War syndrome 650w
Public records, Disclosure of information 467w
War pensions, Nuclear weapons tests 544w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Gwent (08.04.98) 321
Questions
Development agencies, Wales 810

Llanrwst
Property development 104-5w

Lloyd, Mr Tony, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Arms exports, Annual reports 321w
Arms trade 198w
Balkans, Ministers' visits abroad 320-1w
Chechnya, Hostages 396w
Commonwealth Business Council 687w
Croatia, Repatriation 147
Diplomatic relations 397w
Diplomatic service 396w
Diplomatic service, Private education 321-5w
Forced labour 721-2w
Foreign policy, Ethics 198w
House of Lords reform 145
Human rights, Departmental responsibilities 722w
India, Nuclear non proliferation 397-8w
International Criminal Court 326w
Iraq, Arms trade 163w
Kenya, Democracy 325w
Kenya, Human rights 395-6w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 200-1w
Nigeria, Democracy 154, 201w
Nigeria, Deportation 154
Nigeria, Human rights 154-5
Nigeria, Presidential elections 155
Pay, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 86-7w
Smuggling, Radioactive materials 398w
UN finances 201-2w
UN Human Rights Committee 91w
Westminster Foundation for Democracy 144-5
Yugoslavia, Peace negotiations 146-7

Lloyd's of London
151w
Balance of payments 249-50w

Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R (20.04.98) 537-62

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 372
Intervention during Easter recess motion speech (08.04.98) 288, 310
Questions
Agriculture, Innovation 81-2w
Agriculture, Wales 805

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn—continued
Belarus, Overseas aid 239w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 81w
Children in care, Wales 101w, 207w
Colombia, Overseas aid 18w
Conditional fee agreements 610w
Drug abuse, Health education 207-8w
Family courts, Translation services 609w
Gulf War syndrome 7-8
Hospital education, Wales 572w
Industrial diseases, Asbestos 191-2w
Information technology, Wales 311w
Jet skis, Safety measures 286-7w
Local government staff, Working conditions 302-3w
Meirionnydd 318w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 139-40
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 440w
Overseas aid, Children 414-5w
Public transport, Expenditure 311-2w
Radioactive waste disposal, Wales 101-2w
Roads, Wales 103w
Sports facilities, North Wales 572-3w
Sports facilities, Wales 102w
Suicide, Farmers 311w
Tipping of waste, Complaints 311w
Tipping of waste, Wales 101w
Welsh Office, Flags 102-3w

Loans
European Investment Bank 622w

Local authorities
Performance standards 303w

Local authority powers
Abandoned cars 523-4w
Fly posting 13-4w

Local Authority Tenders Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (24.04.98) 1147

Local broadcasting
465-6

Local education authorities
Scotland 585w

Local enterprise agencies
Wales 317-8w

Local enterprise companies
Scotland 458-60w

Local government
Ethics 10-1w

Local Government Boundary Changes (Referendum) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Local government elections
Handicapped 258-9w

Local government expenditure
Nursery schools 128w
Political refugees 120-2w

Local Government (Experimental Arrangements) Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1149

Local government finance
145-6w
Derbyshire (08.04.98) 280-2
Wales 211w, 655w

Local government functions
Social security reform 385w
Sports facilities 33w

Local government reform
Ethics 674w

Local government services
Competition 288w

Local government staff
Inner London boroughs 299-300w
Working conditions 302-3w

Local Government Staff Commission England
145w

Lock, Mr David
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 200w
Textiles, Russia 61-2w

Lockerbie
Bombings 579, 588

London boroughs
Housing benefits 391-2w

London Lighthouse
362w

London Underground
611-2w
Advertising 289w
Finance 289w
Investment 6w
Passengers 6-7w
Performance standards 6w

Lone parents
Day care of children 584w
Departmental publications 224w
Family credit 539w
Income support 539w, 604-5w
Scotland 538w
Social security benefits 388-91w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Ministerial policy advisors 589
Official hospitality 320w
Surveys 609-10w

Lotteries and Amusement Act 1976
Questions
518-9w

Lottery distributors
139-41w, 469-70
West Midlands 468-9

Loughton, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
British Museum (Lindisfarne Gospels) Bill, 1R (08.04.98) 366-8
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 606, 610, 613
Questions
Capital gains tax 245w, 399w
Capital gains tax, Personal equity plans 244-5w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 653w
Individual savings accounts, Tax allowances 244w
Museums and galleries, Admission charges 41w
Museums and galleries, Government grants 449w
Open ended investment companies 399w
Personal equity plans, Tax allowances 243-4w
Retail prices index 254w
Tax allowances, Pensioners 254w

Love, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 658-62
Questions
Air fares, Competition 345w
Audit Commission Review Advisory Group 290w
Company management 358w
Educational standards 500w
Foreign investment in UK 564w

Love, Mr Andrew—continued
Hospital beds 368w
Labour market, Statistics 250-1w
North Thames Regional Health Authority, Hospital beds 367-8w
Prescription drugs, Children 613-4w
Training and enterprise councils, Greater London 685w
Welfare to work 696w

Low flying
Gibraltar 397w
Sheffield 222w

Low pay
403w
Young people 624-5w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Countryside, Public petitions (24.04.98) 1073
Questions
Civil rights, Prisoners 516w
Inland waterways 419-20w
Inland waterways, Repairs and maintenance 565w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 139-40
Small claims, Prisons 515-6w

Luton
Drug crimes 346

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 375, 394-7, 402
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1126, 1131-2
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1082, 1086-9, 1092, 1110, 1114, 1116, 1120-1

M25
Road works 550w

McAllion, Mr John
Questions
Council housing, Scotland 583w
Primary health care, Scotland 582
Skye bridge 239-40w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Questions
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 143
Firearms, Northern Ireland 178w

McCartney, Mr Ian, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1125, 1128-9, 1135-7, 1141-4
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 31-42
Questions
Art works, EC law 508-10w
Company management 358w
Conditions of employment, Young people 361w
Employment agencies, Ex gratia payments 709w
Employment Rights Act 1996, Ex gratia payments 563w
Fisheries, Working hours 572w
Foreign investment in UK 564w
Motor industry, Foreign investment in UK 160w
Newspaper press, Competition 511w
Post Office 357w
Post Office, Competition 562w
Post Office Counters 357w, 711w
Postal rates, Europe 710w
Postal services, Welsh language 574w
Training, EC grants and loans 327-8w

McCartney, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 839-40, 842, 849-50, 852, 854, 857, 859-60, 864, 875, 882-5, 903, 909, 913-6, 918, 921
Questions
Housing construction, Northern Ireland 178w
Lawther Day Centre Belfast 433w
Northern Ireland government 815-6
Northern Ireland Office, Civil service recruitment 179w
Radio Telefis Eireann 432-3w
Stormont, Construction 676w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 74w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 336-7

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Arts, Trade promotion 147-8

***Macdonald, Mr Calum**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office*
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Scotland 460-1w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 584-5w
Council housing, Scotland 583w
Council tax, Scotland 585-6w
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 720w
Farm incomes, Scotland 584
Fish farming, Scotland 107w
Grazing land, Scotland 459-60w
Hazardous wastes, Scotland 108-9w
Hedges and ditches, Scotland 461w
Integrated administration and control system, Scotland 108w
Social Exclusion Unit, Scotland 583-5
Solway Firth, Fishing 240w

McDonnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 218
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 498
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 65-6
Questions
Northern Ireland government 338-9

Macedonia
Armed forces deployment 145-6

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 872-3, 875-7, 906
Questions
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 303w

McGuire, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 416, 427-30

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Army bases, York (22.04.98) 780
Town and country planning, Vale of York (22.04.98) 784-9
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 49w
Driving, Diabetes 548w
EC enlargement, Environment protection 153
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 801

***McIntosh, Miss Anne**—continued*
House of Commons voting methods, Electronic voting 395w
Maintenance, Children 129-30w
Milk, Prices 491w
Uniform business rate 420w

McIsaac, Shona
Questions
Election administration, Northern Ireland 342-3
New deal for young unemployed 684w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 853-8, 919-20
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 482-3
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 931

McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Questions
New deal schemes, Scotland 587

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 851, 896, 900-2, 905, 910
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 496-7
Questions
Hospital patients, Death 683w
M25, Road works 550w
Millennium Exhibition 473

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Ministerial statements, Points of order (22.04.98) 828
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 494
Oral question time intervention (22.04.98) 820
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1140-4
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1106-11
Waste Minimisation Bill, Rep and 3R adjourned (24.04.98) 1145-6
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 218w
Solway Firth, Fishing 240w

***McLeish, Mr Henry**, Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office*
Questions
Air transport, Scotland 106w
Bus services, Scotland 587-8w
Cornton Vale Prison 586
Crimes against the person, Homosexuality 617w
Ferries, Scotland 582w
Fire services, Scotland 457w
Grampian Police 586
Licensed premises, Glasgow 588w
Lockerbie, Bombings 579
Mentally disadvantaged, Scotland 618w
Passenger ships, EC law 582w
Roads, Scotland 583w
Scottish Parliament 582-3w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 581w
Sentencing, Scotland 585-6
Skye bridge 239-40w

Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 164-5, 173, 195-9, 249
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 821-2

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Council tax, Derbyshire (08.04.98) 270-2
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 29

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 418-20, 451
Questions
Air accidents, Disclosure of information 55w
Armed forces, Criminal proceedings 54-5w
Army in Northern Ireland 650-1w
Army in Northern Ireland, Disclosure of information 76w
Army in Northern Ireland, Proscribed organisations 180w, 272w
Complaints against police, Northern Ireland 76w
Finucane, Patrick, Homicide 648w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 178w
Force Research Unit 281w
Home Office, Departmental publications 28-32w
Human rights, Northern Ireland 438w
Judiciary, Training 609w
Juries, Northern Ireland 649w
Legal profession, Northern Ireland 647w
Maze Prison 76w
Maze Prison, Prison discipline 435w
Military law, Capital punishment 694w
Nelson, Brian 281w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions 273w
Northern Ireland Life Sentence Review Board 183w
Northern Ireland Life Sentence Review Board, Public appointments 182w
Personal records, Northern Ireland 601-2w
Police interrogation, Northern Ireland 648w
Police training, Northern Ireland 647w
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 182w, 436w
Public interest, Administration of justice 602w
Right of silence, Northern Ireland 648-9w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Codes of practice 435w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Performance standards 181w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Personal records 602-3w
Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry 601-2w
Surveillance, Police powers 639w
Terrorism 638-9w
UN Committee Against Torture 28w
Weapons, Proscribed organisations 702w
Women, Northern Ireland 181w

McNulty, Mr Tony
Questions
Business questions 974
Commission for Racial Equality, Public appointments 702w
Debts, Developing countries 963-4
Employment, Equal opportunities 335-6
Greater London Authority, Finance 146-7w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 703
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 678
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 88-9, 103-4, 106-12
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 23-4, 39, 44-5
Questions
Euro 954
Income tax 400-2w
Mass media, Ownership 468
Train operating units, Bicycles 1w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 381, 385-6
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 85
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 169, 203, 225, 228
Questions
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council 256-7w
Immigration controls 255-6w
Immigration rules 31-2w

McWilliam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 538-9, 545

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Questions
Demonstrations, Northern Ireland 273w, 601w
Mediation Network for Northern Ireland 434w
Mediation Network for Northern Ireland, Government grants 181w
Northern Ireland government 434-5w
Referendums, Northern Ireland 181w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 434w

Magistrates' courts
Arrest warrants 706w
Closures 592-4

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Chlamydiosis (08.04.98) 269-70
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 175-6
Questions
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 47-8w

Maidstone Prison
535w

Maintenance
Children 129-30w, 132-3w, 374-6w

Major, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 187-92

Malaysia
Defence 3-4
Ministers' visits abroad 3-4

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 410-2
Questions
Immigration Appeal Tribunal, Administrative delays 590

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 839, 858-63, 897-9, 902-4, 908-9, 915-9, 925, 928
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 491-2

Manchester
Commonwealth Games 33w

Mandelson, Mr Peter, Minister Without Portfolio
Questions
Millennium Exhibition 318-9w, 452-3w, 473-4, 477-8
Millennium Exhibition, Air conditioning 77-8w
Millennium Exhibition, British Sky Broadcasting 477
Millennium Exhibition, Building workers 78w, 320w
Millennium Exhibition, Christianity 474-5
Millennium Exhibition, Contracts 78-9w, 319w
Millennium Exhibition, Corporate plans 477
Millennium Exhibition, Design 472-3
Millennium Exhibition, Holiday accommodation 318-9w
Millennium Exhibition, Mass media 319w
Millennium Exhibition, Religion 478
Millennium Exhibition, Safety standards 78w
Millennium Exhibition, Sponsorship 318w
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 473-4
Millennium Exhibition, Virtual reality 478
Millennium Exhibition, Welsh language 319w

Manufactured goods
Asbestos 156-8w

Manufacturing industries
Opposition days (06.04.98) 82-131
Redundancy 161-2w
Wales 653w

Marek, Dr John
Questions
Gibraltar, Low flying 397w
Gibraltar, Migrant workers 326w
Railway stations, Wrexham 573w

Marginal tax rates
36-7w
Families 964-5

Market research
536w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 79w
Social security 223-4w, 607-8w

Markets
Farmers 85w

Married people
First time buyers 71w
Student grants 658w

Married personal allowance
620-2w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Questions
Winter fuel payments, Take-up 379w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Air transport, Scotland 106w
Environmental health, Glasgow 575
Security industry, Regulatory systems 172w
Social security claims, Medical examinations 393-4w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Gulf states 12

Martlew, Mr Eric
Questions
Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group 234-5w

Mass media
Millennium Exhibition 319w
Ownership 58w, 68w, 142w, 450w, 465-8
Shareholders 58-9w

Maternal mortality
Refugees 681-2w

Maternity services
Hospital closures 118w

Mature students
Income support 659w
Jobseeker's allowance 661w
Student grants 657-9w

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 168, 172-84, 251-2, 254
Questions
Lottery distributors 141w
Mass media, Ownership 468
Millennium Exhibition, Design 472-3
Millennium Exhibition, Pollution control 4-5w
National Lottery, Finance 469

Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 372, 379-88, 449
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 530-2
Questions
Special education 502w

Maxton, Mr John
Questions
Fluoridation, Scotland 575-6

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 377
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 76
Questions
Bye laws 420w
Early excellence centres 92w
Electronic funds transfer 150w
Electronic mail 345w
Employment Service, Information technology 226w
Industrial training, Handicapped 92w
Inland Revenue, Millennium compliance 150w, 621-3w
International trade, Internet 347-8w
Literacy 227-8w, 660w, 723w
Literacy Task Force 660w
Local government finance, Wales 655w
National insurance contributions, Personal pensions 604w
Parking, Schools 421w
Police Information Technology Organisation, Millennium compliance 258w
Public footpaths, Handicapped 293-4w
Social security payments, Automation 133w
Tax allowances, Day care of children 623w

May Panel
see Security Vetting Appeals Panel

Maze Prison
76w
Prison discipline 435w
Security 267-8w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael, Minister for the Environment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Environment Agencies Legislation Review 306-7w
Genetically modified organisms, Environment protection 10w, 285-6w

Meat
Imports 490-2w

Meat Hygiene Service
Expenditure 488w

Meat products
Waste disposal 212-3w

Mediation Network for Northern Ireland
434w
Government grants 181w

Medical equipment
VAT 41w

Medical ethics
Abortion 195w

Medical examinations
Social security claims 393-4w

Medical records
Disclosure of information 231-2w
Fees and charges 190-1w

Medical research
Immunology 117w
Organophosphates 213w, 233-4w

Medical treatments
Accidents 104w, 107w, 124w, 436w
Cancer 817-8
Cholesterol 197-8w
North Essex Health Authority 117w

Meirionnydd
318w

Members' allowances
Members' attendance 35w

Members' attendance
Blair, Tony 16
Members' allowances 35w

Members' conduct
17
Oral questions 17-8

Members' correspondence
Action 2000 349w
Administrative delays 541w, 704w, 721w
Electric shock equipment 330w
Ministry of Defence 282w

Members' partners
Official visits 72w, 675w

Mental Health (Amendment) (No 2) Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1150

Mental patients
192-3w

Mentally disadvantaged
Administration of justice 568w
Scotlsnd 618w

Merchant Shipping (Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims) (Amendment) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(21.04.98) 721-2

Merchant Shipping Working Group
424w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Debates etc.
Football Sponsorship Levy Bill, 1R (07.04.98) 159-61
Questions
Welfare to work 959-60

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company
Government shareholding 561w

Merseyside Police
Disciplinary proceedings 531w

Merton Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority
Finance 579-80w

Meteorological Office
Performance standards 714w

MI5
25w, 260w
Disclosure of information 25w, 247w

Michael, Mr Alun, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 383, 385, 404, 407, 448-52
Questions
Air traffic control, Millennium compliance 583
Crime, Music 266w
Crime, Unemployment 522-3w
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) 1997/98 171w, 513w
Crimes against the person, Homosexuality 636–8w
Criminal appeals 26-7w
Criminal Cases Review Commission 177-8w
Criminal investigation 266w
Custodial treatment, Women 530w
Domestic violence, Prosecutions 259w
Domestic violence, West Midlands 21w, 259w
Firearms 514w
Firearms, Compensation 19-20w, 514w
Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, Civil proceedings 514w
Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, Enforcement 19w
Firearms certificates 20-1w
Football, Arrests 558-9w
Homosexuality, Self defence 636w
Internet Watch Foundation 175-6w
Intimidation of witnesses 677w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 704w
Merseyside Police, Disciplinary proceedings 531w
Motor insurance, Driving offences 18-9w
Passports, Fraud 517-8w
Police, Departmental circulars 635w
Police, Ethnic minorities 519w, 635w
Police, Manpower 703-4w
Police equipment, Chemical weapons 262w
Police Information Technology Organisation, Millennium compliance 258w
Police powers, Abandoned cars 523-4w
Police training, Driving instruction 638w
Runaway children 27w
Security industry, Regulatory systems 172w
Sexual offences 532w
Sexual offences, Data banks 704w
Smuggling, Radioactive materials 534w
Social problems, Crime prevention 531-2w
Surveillance, Police powers 639w

Michael, Mr Alun—continued
Terrorism 638-9w
Tobacco, Retail trade 267w
Tree felling, Kingston upon Thames 26w
Voluntary organisations 259w
Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group 703w
Witnesses 559w
Women's Royal Voluntary Service, Government grants 529-30w
Young offenders, Administration of justice 533w
Young offenders, Community service orders 24w
Young offenders, Secure accommodation 634-5w
Youth offending teams 24w, 171-2w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Armoured fighting vehicles, Defence procurement 649-50w
Emergency planning 524-9w
Holiday leave 352
Women's Royal Voluntary Service, Government grants 529-30w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Questions
Ferries, Scotland 582w
NHS trusts, Scotland 580

Microbiology
Disease control 733-4w

Middle East
Armed forces deployment 56-7w
EC aid 199w
EC external relations 140-1
Ministers' visits abroad 142, 151
Peace negotiations 139-40, 142-3, 150-1, 199-200w, 810-2, 815

Midwives
Primary health care 369w

Migrant workers
Gibraltar 326w

Milburn, Mr Alan, Minister of State, Dept of Health
Questions
Access Committee for England, Finance 126-7w
Accident and emergency departments, Hospital closures 118w
Accidents, Medical treatments 124w
AIDS, Vaccination 615w
Benzodiazepines, Prescriptions 615w
Cholesterol, Medical treatments 197-8w
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust, Public appointments 125w
Community hospitals, Closures 194-5w
Contraceptives, VAT 615w
East Kent Health Authority, Extra contractual referrals 367w
English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting 370w
General practitioners, Sunderland 364-5w
Health authorities, Public appointments 614w
Health service staff 578w
Health services 577w
Health services, Expenditure 684w
Heart diseases 576w
Hospital beds 368w
Hospital consultants, Contracts 734w
Hospital consultants, Pay incentives 197w, 577w
Hospital discharges 578-9w
Hospital patients, Death 683w
Hospital waiting lists 126w, 364w
Hospital waiting lists, Sunderland 732w
Hospitals, Parking 615w

Milburn, Mr Alan—*continued*
Information technology, Dept of Health 127-8w
Lead, Paint 575w
Medical records, Fees and charges 190-1w
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority, Finance 579-80w
Microbiology, Disease control 733-4w
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust, Hospital waiting lists 580-1w
NHS, Expenditure 576-7w
NHS, Fuels 194w, 366w
NHS, New deal schemes 371w
NHS and private practice, Income 373w
NHS finance 373w
NHS trusts, North East region 362w
North Thames Regional Health Authority, Hospital beds 367-8w
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust 196-7w
Nurses 683-4w
Prescribing Supply and Administration of Medicines Review Team 578w
Prescription charges 126w, 732w
Prescription drugs 124w
Prescription drugs, Elderly 371-2w
Primary health care 684w
Private health services 363-4w
Prozac, Prescriptions 372w
Residential care, Inspections 115-6w
Solvent abuse, Butane gas 576w

Military aircraft
Air accidents 470w
Aircrew 221w
Repairs and maintenance 692-3w

Military law
Capital punishment 694w

Milk
Prices 491w

Milk Development Council
Reviews 487-8w

Millennium Commission
Staffordshire 34w
Tourism 565-6w

Millennium compliance
72w, 598w
Air traffic control 583
Armed forces 220-1w
Cabinet committees 72w
Consultants 349w
EC action 349w
Emergency services 582-3
Inland Revenue 150w, 621-3w
International cooperation 406w
Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Executive 183w
Police Information Technology Organisation 258w
Public utilities 349-50w
Scottish Office 584w
Small businesses 91-2w
Telephone services 349w

Millennium Conformity Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1150

Millennium Exhibition
318-9w, 452-3w, 473-4, 477-8, 566w
Air conditioning 77-8w
British Sky Broadcasting 477
Building workers 78w, 320w
Christianity 474-5
Contracts 78-9w, 319w
Corporate plans 477
Design 472-3
Holiday accommodation 318-9w
Land pollution 294w
Mass media 319w

Millennium Exhibition—*continued*
Pollution control 4-5w
Religion 478
Safety standards 78w
Sponsorship 318w
Transport 417-8w, 473-4
Virtual reality 478
Welsh language 319w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 530
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 744-5
Questions
Building industry, Consumer protection 15-6w

Minimum wage
347-8, 350-1
Northern Ireland 179-80w, 270w
Wales 652-3w

Minister without Portfolio
Ministerial duties 69w
Oral questions 17-8

Ministerial duties
Deputy Prime Minister 69w
Gibraltar 326w
Minister without Portfolio 69w

Ministerial policy advisors
Lord Chancellor's Dept 589

Ministerial statements
34-5w
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 353-64
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 479-500
Speaker's rulings and statements (22.04.98) 828-9

Ministerial Task Group on the Home Buying Process
424w

Ministers
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 395w

Ministers' domestic visits
Northern Ireland Office 431w
Prisons 535w
Royal Naval College 51w

Ministers' visits abroad
Balkans 320-1w
Dept of Trade and Industry 64w
Israel 150
Malaysia 3-4
Middle East 142, 151
Singapore 556w
Syrian Arab Republic 198w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Market research 79w
Official engagements 470-86w

Ministry of Defence
Information technology 54w
Libraries 55-6w
Members' correspondence 282w
Official hospitality 280w, 649w

Ministry of Defence Police
49w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 52w
Salisbury Plain 466-7w

Mink
425w

Misrepresentation
Personal pensions 247-50w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 515-7
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 714-7
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Germany 1-2
Drama, Income 466-7
Economic and monetary union, Exchange rates 631w
Exchange rates 698w
Exports, Exchange rates 348w
Housing benefits 135w
Housing benefits, Earnings rules 135w
Income support, Take-up 136w
Inflation 699-701w
Millennium Exhibition 318-9w, 452w
Millennium Exhibition, Holiday accommodation 318-9w
Millennium Exhibition, Mass media 319w
Monetary Policy Committee 699w
Retail prices index, Inflation 699-700w
UK contributions to EC budget 42w

MMR vaccine
732-3w

Mobility allowance
Taxation 242w

Mobility of disabled
New deal for disabled people 541w

Moffatt, Laura
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 206-7
Questions
Defence procurement 50w
Gulf War syndrome 8

Monetary Policy Committee
699w

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 519
Questions
Local government services, Competition 288w

Moore, Mr Michael
Questions
Agency nurses, Scotland 114w
Drug abuse, Scotland 113w
Hospital admissions, Scotland 110-2w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 113-4w
Local enterprise companies, Scotland 458-60w
Nurses 683-4w
Nurses, Northern Ireland 678w
Nurses, Scotland 114-6w
Nurses, Wales 692w

Moran, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Electronic government (06.04.98) 133-5
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 634-7, 666
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 495
Questions
Drug crimes, Luton 346
Land Registers of Northern Ireland, Performance standards 77w
Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Performance standards 76-7w

Morgan, Mr Alasdair
Questions
Ammunition, Uranium 221-2w
Diseases, Scotland 170w

Morgan, Mr Alasdair*—*continued
Extractive industries, Life insurance 356w
Hydrographic Office, Operating costs 52-4w
Mentally disadvantaged, Scotland 618w
Passenger ships, EC law 582w

Morgan, Ms Julie
Questions
Breast cancer, Tamoxifen 575-6w
Custodial treatment, Women 530w
Day care of children, Wales 652w
International Labour Organisation, Child workers 225w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 442w
Public appointments, Wales 444-5w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Questions
Cholesterol, Medical treatments 197-8w
House of Commons times of sittings 15-6
Jobseeker's allowance, Insurance 136-7w, 540w
Millennium Exhibition 477-8
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Finance 440w, 713-4w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Offices 441w
Welsh Office, Offices 440-1w

***Morley, Mr Elliot**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Beekeeping (22.04.98) 758, 762-3, 765-6, 769-75
Questions
Agriculture, Innovation 81-2w
Common fisheries policy 83w
Common fisheries policy, Questionnaires 666w
Dredging, Harwich 666w
Export of live animals, Animal welfare 665w
Farmers, Bankruptcy 83w
Farmers, Early retirement 664w
Farmers, Markets 85w
Fisheries, Departmental correspondence 665w
Fisheries, EC grants and loans 663-4w
Fishing limits 673w
Fishing quotas 665w
Fishing vessels 673w
Fishing vessels, Licensing 665-6w
Flood control 85w
Food surpluses, Charitable donations 83w
Market research, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 79w
Pigs, Animal feed 83-4w
Pigs, Animal welfare 218w
Poultry, Animal welfare 662-3w, 719w
Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group 489-90w, 665w

***Morris, Ms Estelle**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Class sizes 331w
Consumer education 645w
Dyslexia 336w
Early excellence centres 92w
Educational psychology, Pupil-teacher ratios 498-500w
Educational standards 500w
Music education, Curriculum 502w
Physical education 492-3w
Pupil exclusions 343-4w
Pupil exclusions, Easington 497w
Pupil exclusions, Leicestershire 497-8w

Morris, Ms Estelle*—*continued
Pupil exclusions, West Midlands 344w
Special education 502w
Special education, Autism 659-60w
Special Educational Needs National Advisory Group 335w
Special schools, Educational standards 494w
Teacher training, Tuition fees 502w
Teacher Training Agency, Finance 595w

***Morris, Rt Hon John**, Attorney-General*
Questions
Attorney General, Theft 438-9w
Computer fraud 438w
Criminal proceedings, Tax evasion 230-1w
Crown Prosecution Service, Consultants 438w
Demonstrations, Northern Ireland 273w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions 273w

Morris Advisory Group
see Special Educational Needs National Advisory Group

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 886-7
Questions
Northern Ireland government 342

Motor industry
Foreign investment in UK 160w

Motor insurance
Driving offences 18-9w

Motor vehicle registration
143w
Fees and charges 289w

Motor vehicle testing
Fraud 295-6w

Motor vehicle type approval
308-9w

Motorcycles
Driving licences 293w

Motorway service areas
Solihull 296w

Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust
Hospital waiting lists 580-1w

Mountford, Kali
Questions
Common agricultural policy 217-8w
South Africa, Trade agreements 397w

***Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, 1R (21.04.98) 595
Northern Ireland government, Ministerial statements (20.04.98) 479-500
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council 432w
Army in Northern Ireland, Disclosure of information 76w
Army in Northern Ireland, Proscribed organisations 180w
Gaelic language, Languages education 178w
Human rights, Northern Ireland 438w
Land Registers of Northern Ireland, Performance standards 77w
Maze Prison 76w

Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie*—*continued
Northern Ireland government 74-6w, 269w, 434-5w
Northern Ireland Office, Civil service recruitment 179w
Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Performance standards 76-7w
Radio Telefis Eireann 432-3w
Referendums, Northern Ireland 181w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 374, 407-10
Questions
Merseyside Police, Disciplinary proceedings 531w
Planning permission, Sunderland 303w

Multilateral Agreement on Investment
61w, 161w

Multiple occupation
Private rented housing 709w

Multiple sclerosis
Handicap benefits 537w

Murdoch, Rupert
71w

Murphy, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 228-33
Questions
Gardening leave 687w
Small businesses, Northern Ireland 268w

***Murphy, Mr Paul**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Debates
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 847-53, 887-9, 895-6, 899-900, 907, 909-10, 921-3
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 930-1, 940
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 646-7w
Community regeneration initiative special project, Northern Ireland 189-90w
Computers, Northern Ireland Office 598-602w
Conferences, Northern Ireland Office 431-2w
Driving instruction, Northern Ireland 75w
Driving licences, Northern Ireland 190w
Drug abuse, Death 272w
Drug abuse, Northern Ireland 271w
Empty housing, Belfast 180w
Housing construction, Northern Ireland 178w
Mediation Network for Northern Ireland, Government grants 181w
Ministers' domestic visits, Northern Ireland Office 431w
Northern Ireland Water Service Agency 183-8w
Pay, Northern Ireland Office 431w
Planning permission, Newtownards 603w
Public sector housing, Northern Ireland 180w
Referendums, Northern Ireland 270w
Road accidents, Northern Ireland 270-1w
Stormont, Construction 676w
Surveys, Northern Ireland Office 432w
Transport policy, Northern Ireland Office 645w

Museums and galleries
Admission charges 41w
Dudley 465

***Museums and galleries**—continued*
Education 451w
Government grants 449-50w
Portsmouth (08.04.98) 282-4
Scotland 455-6w
Theft 139w

Music
Crime 266w
Public places 369w

Music education
464
Curriculum 502w

Mustard gas
467w

National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs
see Special Educational Needs National Advisory Group

National Assembly of Wales
651-2w, 807
Parliamentary buildings 440w

National Blood Authority
Ministerial statements (08.04.98) 353-64

National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting in England
see English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting

National disability development initiative
338w

National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts
Norwich 450w

National House Building Council
(22.04.98) 792-800

National income
Culture 139w
Italy 561w

National insurance contributions
147w, 243w, 377-8w, 400-2w, 543-4w
Educational finance 228w
Personal pensions 604w
Retirement pensions 377w

National Insurance Fund
686-7w

National Lottery
399w
Cricket 657w
Finance 450w, 469
Piers 463

National Lottery Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R and Money res (07.04.98) 162-261
Questions
399w, 469-70

National Lottery Etc Act 1993
Questions
139-41w

National Meat Hygiene Service
see Meat Hygiene Service

National Orchestra of Wales
Finance 657w

National parks
424w

National Sports Institute
see UK Sports Institute

NATO
Russia 50w

NATO enlargement
281-2w

Nature conservation
Birds of prey 266w
Cardigan Bay 807
Wales 105w

Negligence
Compensation (08.04.98) 453-60

Nelson, Brian
281w

New deal for disabled people
Mobility of disabled 541w

New deal for lone parents
224w, 730-1w
Manpower 537-8w

New deal for young unemployed
92w, 588-90w, 684w

New deal schemes
501w
Employment Service 337w
Hexham 339w
Jobclubs 226w
NHS 371w
Scotland 586-7
South West Hertfordshire 338w
Stoke on Trent 336-7w
Wales 574w, 652w, 807-9
Wellingborough 339w
Young offenders 439-40w

"New NHS White Paper"
369w

News International
467-8

Newspaper press
Competition 511w
Ownership 73w

Newsprint
Recycling 353w

Newtownards
Planning permission 603w

NHS
Expenditure 576-7w
Fuels 194w, 366w
New deal schemes 371w
Social services 206w
Wales 206w

NHS and private practice
Income 373w

NHS finance
373w

NHS trusts
Blaenau Gwent 801
Gwent (08.04.98) 319-25, 653w
North East region 362w
Scotland 579-81
Wales 209-10w, 443w, 655w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Intervention during questions after statement (08.04.98) 363
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 355-6
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1128, 1132-5
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1077, 1083-7, 1120-1
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 28
Questions
Meat, Imports 490-2w
Private health services 363-4w
Rear seat belts 611w

Nigeria
Democracy 154, 201w
Deportation 154
Human rights 154-5

***Nigeria**—continued*
Presidential elections 155

Noise control
295w

Nomenclature of statistical territorial units
419w

Non-departmental public bodies
68-9w, 717w
Ethnic minorities 442w
Performance standards 153-4w
Scottish Office 165-8w
Wales 442w

Non-domestic rates
612-3w
Charities 8w
Public houses 8w

Norman, Mr Archie
Debates etc.
Beekeeping (22.04.98) 752-8, 760, 765-6, 771

North East region
NHS trusts 362w

North Essex Health Authority
Medical treatments 117w

North Thames Regional Health Authority
Hospital beds 367-8w
Pay beds 367-8w

North Wales
Sports facilities 572-3w

North West region
Piers 33w
Prisoners 705w
Theatres 33-4w
Training and enterprise councils 660-1w
Waste disposal 416w, 547w, 669w

Northern Ireland
Accidents 436w
Admissibility of evidence 648-9w
Average earnings 179w
Banks 190w
Beef 337-8
Bovine tuberculosis 646-7w
Cellular phones 433w
Children 269w
Community regeneration initiative special project 189-90w
Complaints against police 76w
Conservative Party 269w
Crimes against the person 702w
Day care of children 269w
Demonstrations 273w, 601w
Driving instruction 75w
Driving licences 190w
Drug abuse 271-2w, 646w
Election administration 342-3
Electricity interconnectors 271-2w
Employment 268w, 335-6
Energy prices 188-9w
Firearms 178w
Foreign investment in UK 189w, 272w
Grammar schools 270w
Handicapped 335
Housing construction 178w
Human rights 438w
Juries 649w
Legal profession 647w
Minimum wage 179-80w, 270w
Nurses 678w
Osteoporosis 436-8w
Parliamentary buildings 676w
Personal records 601-2w
Police interrogation 648w
Police training 647w
Prisoners' release 182w, 436w

Northern Ireland—continued
Public interest 602w
Public sector housing 180w
Radiation hazards 433w
Referendums 181w, 270w, (22.04.98) 930-40
Right of silence 648-9w
Road accidents 270-1w
Road traffic 270-1w
Seagate 645-6w
Security 343-4
Small businesses 268w
Suicide 271w
Terrorism 74w, 341-2
Tourism 268w, 676-7w
Trials 273w
Unemployment 336-7
Water charges 183-9w
Weapons 702w
Welfare to work 336
Women 181w

Northern Ireland Assembly
268w

Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions
273w

Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Business questions (20.04.98) 502
1R (21.04.98) 595
Order relating to Com (21.04.98) 719
Programme motion* (21.04.98) 720-1
Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 833-929

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1998
Questions
648w

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (08.04.98) 364

Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations Etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(22.04.98) 930-40

Northern Ireland government
74-6w, 181w, 269-70w, 338-42, 344-6, 434-5w, 811, 815-6, (22.04.98) 930-40
Ministerial statements (20.04.98) 479-500

Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Executive
Millennium compliance 183w

Northern Ireland Life Sentence Review Board
183w
Public appointments 182w

Northern Ireland Negotiations (Referendum) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(22.04.98) 930-40

Northern Ireland Office
Civil service recruitment 179w
Computers 598-602w
Conferences 431-2w
Ministers' domestic visits 431w
Pay 431w
Public relations 434-5w
Surveys 432w
Transport policy 645w

Northern Ireland Parades Commission
see Parades Commission

Northern Ireland Water Service Agency
183-8w

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
196-7w

Norwich
National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts 450w

Nottinghamshire
Structure plans 144-5w

Nuclear disarmament
349-50

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
Dounreay 721w, 821-6

Nuclear non proliferation
India 397-8w
Pakistan 397-8w

Nuclear power
Treaties 70w

Nuclear power stations
Decommissioning 563-4w

Nuclear weapons
644w
Persian Gulf 12

Nuclear weapons deployment
WE 177 nuclear bomb 467w

Nuclear weapons policy
349

Nuclear weapons tests
Exservicemen 466w
War pensions 544w

Nursery Education (England) Regulations 1998
Debates etc.
(08.04.98) 452

Nursery schools
(22.04.98) 830-2
Local government expenditure 128w

Nurses
683-4w
Northern Ireland 678w
Prison medical services 533w
Scotland 114-6w
Wales 692w

Nurses Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997
Questions
370w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Questions
Access Committee for England, Finance 126-7w
Buses, Handicapped 421w
Disability living allowance 604w
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, Research 133w
Disabled person's tax credit, Disability living allowance 245w
Landlords 16w
Local authorities, Performance standards 303w
New deal for disabled people, Mobility of disabled 541w
Polling stations, Access to buildings 258-9w
Public transport, Handicapped 421-2w
Underground railways, Handicapped 422w

O'Brien, Mr Mike, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Questions
Church of England, Human rights 534w
Commission for Racial Equality, Public appointments 702w

O'Brien, Mr Mike—continued
Ethnic minorities, Government grants 18w
Immigrant detainees 173-4w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Liverpool 520w
Immigration applications, Administrative delays 535-6w
Immigration officers 172-3w
Immigration rules 31-2w
Passports, Children 173w
Passports, Families 520w
Political refugees 707w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 312
Questions
Northern Ireland government 269w

Occupied territories
Israel 139-40

Officer Training Corps
220w

Offices
Welsh Health Common Services Authority 441w
Welsh Office 440-1w

Official cars
Bishops 475

Official engagements
273w, 651w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 470-86w

Official hospitality
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 1w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 321w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 320w
Ministry of Defence 280w, 649w
Prime Minister 68w

Official publications
Budget 253-4w

Official residences
407w, 674-5w

Official visits
Members' partners 72w, 675w

Offset arrangements
Defence contracts 557w
Oman 558w, 711w
Project Al Yamamah 557-8w

Offshore drilling
Sea pollution 154-6w

Olner, Mr Bill
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Death 462-3w
Passports, Children 173w

Oman
Offset arrangements 558w, 711w

Open ended investment companies
399w

Open government
73w, 309w

Opik, Mr Lembit
Questions
Astronomy, Research finance 616w
Average earnings, Northern Ireland 179w
British-Irish Interparliamentary Body, Ulster Unionists 341
European Night Services, Finance 422-3w
Eurostar, Birmingham 422w
Forestry, Wales 442-3w
Forestry Commission, Wales 443w
Low pay, Young people 624-5w
Maintenance, Children 130w

Opik, Mr Lembit—continued
Minimum wage, Northern Ireland 179-80w
NHS trusts, Wales 655w
Regional development agencies, Recruitment 423w
VAT, Medical equipment 41w
Voting behaviour, Young people 531w

Opposition days
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 82-131
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 22-81

Opposition parties
Finance 724-6w

Oral contraceptives
Prescription charges 731-2w

Oral questions
71w
Members' conduct 17-8
Minister without Portfolio 17-8

Orchestras
Bournemouth (08.04.98) 278-9

Orders and regulations
Radioactive wastes 351-2w

Ordnance Disposal School Chattendon
281w

Organ, Mrs Diana
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 178, 199-201
Questions
Calor Gas, Gas tariffs 155w
Non-departmental public bodies, Performance standards 153-4w
Unemployment, Statistics 817

Organophosphates
84w, 491w
Licensing 718-9w
Medical research 213w, 233-4w

Osborne, Ms Sandra
Questions
Cornton Vale Prison 586

Osteopathy
614w

Osteoporosis
122-3w
Northern Ireland 436-8w
Scotland 106-7w
Wales 104w, 212w

Ottaway, Mr Richard
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 143w, 287-8w, 422w

Our Europe Association
202w

"Our Healthier Nation Consultation Paper"
505w

Ouseley, Herman
702w

Out of town shopping centres
Wales 207w

Overseas aid
237w, 408-11w
Afghanistan 238-9w
Belarus 239w
Bhutan 18w
Children 414-5w
Colombia 18w
Departmental coordination 679-80w
Indonesia 411w
Russia 411w
Swaziland 680-2w

Overseas aid—continued
Tobacco industry 17-8w
Ukraine 239w

Overseas investment
Gaming clubs 41w

Overtime
626w

Owner occupied housing
Family credit 41w
Working families tax credit 41w

Oxfordshire
Council tax 813-4

Packaging
Wastes 306w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 102-6, 123
Questions
Lottery distributors 139-41w
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust, Hospital waiting lists 580-1w
New deal schemes, South West Hertfordshire 338w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Beekeeping (22.04.98) 763-9, 772
Questions
EC grants and loans 163w
Economic and monetary union 149
National parks 424w
Town and country planning, Environmental impact assessment 423w

Paint
Lead 551-2w, 575w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 839-40, 848, 856, 871-5, 902, 912-3
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 937-9
Questions
Cellular phones, Radiation 433w

Pakistan
Nuclear non proliferation 397-8w

Palestinians
151-2

Palmer, Dr Nick
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 84, 107, 117-20
Questions
Housing construction, Regional planning and development 424w
Sheep, Export of live animals 488-90w

Paper industry
Trade competitiveness 353-4w

Parades Commission
Public appointments 188w

Parc Prison
260-1w

Parking
Hospitals 615w
Schools 421w

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
see Boundary Commission for Wales

Parliamentary broadcasting
BBC (08.04.98) 272-5

Parliamentary broadcasting—continued
Speaker's rulings and statements (07.04.98) 158

Parliamentary buildings
National Assembly of Wales 440w
Northern Ireland 676w
Scottish Parliament 165-6w, 581w

"Partnership for Equality White Paper"
268w, 335-6

Part-time employment
625-6w, 628-30w

Passenger ships
EC law 582w

Passengers
London Underground 6-7w

Passive smoking
Health education 371w

Passports
Children 173w
Families 520w
Fraud 517-8w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Dorset (20.04.98) 567, 571
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 718
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 669
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 93, 99, 125
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1076, 1091-2, 1097, 1101, 1104-6
Questions
Mass media, Ownership 466
Millennium Exhibition, Virtual reality 478

Pay beds
368w
North Thames Regional Health Authority 367-8w

Pay incentives
Hospital consultants 197w, 577w

Pay settlements
Teachers 661w

Peace negotiations
Cyprus 143-4
Israel 141-2
Middle East 139-40, 142-3, 150-1, 199-200w, 810-2, 815
Yugoslavia 146-7

Pearson, Mr Ian
Questions
Education and industry 348-9w

Pedestrians
Road accidents 297-300w

Pendine
Firing ranges 276w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 184-7

Pension funds
Bus services 294-5w
Coal mining 67-8w, 357w

Pension Provision Group
536-7w

Pensioners
Concessionary television licences 462-3
Income tax 150w
Personal income 37-8w
Tax allowances 254w

Pensions
Family resources survey 541w

Pensions Education Working Group
539-40w

Pensions review
731w

Perham, Ms Linda
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 810-1
Motor vehicle type approval 308-9w
Taxi fares, Greater London 307w

Perinatal mortality
Teenage pregnancy 251w
Wakefield 251w

Persian Gulf
Armed forces deployment 11, 46w, 49w
Chemical and biological warfare 12
HMS Illustrious 11
Nuclear weapons 12

Personal equity plans
Capital gains tax 244-5w
Tax allowances 243-4w

Personal income
Pensioners 37-8w

Personal injury compensation
Legal aid 610w

Personal pensions
Misrepresentation 247-50w
National insurance contributions 604w

Personal property
World War II 62-3w

Personal records
Computer privacy 513w
Northern Ireland 601-2w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 602-3w

Personal savings
697w, 950
Tax yields 241-2w

Personal tax allowances
620-2w

Pesticide residues
Research 84-5w

Pesticides
Costs 85w
Food contamination 84w

Peterlee
Disability living allowance 639w
Incapacity benefit 222-3w

Petrol
Prices 160w
Scotland 582w

Petrol additives
Standards specifications 160w

Physical education
492-3w
Scotland 462w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Questions
Israel, Diplomatic relations 150

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Questions
Church property, Access to countryside 445w
Hospital consultants, Pay incentives 197w
Limestone, Environment protection 303-4w

Piers
Brighton 463
National Lottery 463
North West region 33w

Pigs
Animal feed 83-4w
Animal welfare 218w
Export of live animals 488-90w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 86
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 361-2
Questions
Betting and gaming duties 694w
Business questions 972
Film industry, Investment 467
Members' conduct 17

Pilot schemes
Welfare to work 337-8w

Piracy
285w

Planning permission
426w
Derelict land 418w
Housing construction 307-8w
Newtownards 603w
Sunderland 303w
Tesco 301w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Questions
Business questions 974-5
EC Internal Market Council 360-1w

Plastics
Recycling 143-4w

Police
Departmental circulars 635w
Ethnic minorities 519w, 635w
Finance 576-7
Manpower 703-4w

Police Act 1997
Questions
639w

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Questions
648-9w

Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989
Questions
648-9w

Police authorities
Finance 516-8w

Police equipment
Chemical weapons 262w

Police Information Technology Organisation
Millennium compliance 258w

Police interrogation
Northern Ireland 648w

Police powers
Abandoned cars 523-4w
Surveillance 639w

Police protection
Legal profession 647w

Police (Scotland) Act 1967
Questions
577-8

Police training
Driving instruction 638w
Northern Ireland 647w

Political refugees
707w
Government grants to local authorities 118-9w
Housing benefits 394w
Income support 134w

Political refugees—continued
Legal aid 590-1
Local government expenditure 120-2w

Polling stations
Access to buildings 258-9w

Pollution control
Millennium Exhibition 4-5w

Pollution monitoring
Tipping of waste 416-7w

Pond, Mr Chris
Questions
Minimum wage 350-1

Population
Age 561-2w

Population distribution
42-4w

Porthmadog
Hospitals 208-9w

Portsmouth
Museums and galleries (08.04.98) 282-4

Post Office
63w, 357w
Competition 562w

Post Office Counters
357w, 711w

Post offices
Wales 439w

Post traumatic stress disorder
Counselling 372w

Postal rates
Europe 710w

Postal services
Child Support Agency 131-2w
Welsh language 574w

Poultry
Animal welfare 662-3w, 719w

Poverty
408-9w, 678w
Central Europe 410w
Eastern Europe 410w
Health 691w

Powell, Ray,
Questions
Advisory bodies, Wales 690w
Animal feed, Testing 487w
Animal quarantine 488w
Civil defence, Expenditure 532-3w
Community Fire Safety Task Force 532w
Curriculum, Wales 711w
Day care of children, Wales 443w
Disability Rights Task Force, Public appointments 595-6w
Educational finance, Travelling people 314-5w, 591-4w
Educational standards, Wales 574w
Electricity supply industry 510w
Equal Opportunities Commission 335w
Export of live animals, Animal welfare 665w
Fire service pensions 533w
Fishing vessels, Licensing 665-6w
Fluoridation 117w
Hill livestock allowances 571w
Home Grown Cereals Authority 571w
Hospital beds, Wales 211w
Inland Revenue, Manpower 700w
London Underground, Finance 289w
Merchant Shipping Working Group 424w
Milk Development Council, Reviews 487-8w
Millennium Exhibition, Land pollution 294w

Powell, Ray,—*continued*
Ministerial Task Group on the Home Buying Process 424w
NHS trusts, Wales 443w
Non-departmental public bodies 68-9w, 717w
Open government 309w
Out of town shopping centres, Wales 207w
Post Office 357w
Prison medical services, Nurses 533w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 531w
Regional development agencies, Public appointments 286w
Road works, Construction materials 310-1w
Roads, Wales 443w
Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group 665w
Security Vetting Appeals Panel 675-6w
Sexual offences 532w
Skills Task Force, Public appointments 723-4w
Slaughterhouses, Waste disposal 487w
Social problems, Crime prevention 531-2w
Sustainable development, Wales 689w
Television, Sports 229w
Welsh Office, Secretaries of State 71w
World War II, Personal property 62-3w
Young offenders, Administration of justice 533w

Power industry
Road freight transport 548-9w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Legal profession (08.04.98) 303-4
Questions
Birds of prey, Nature conservation 266w
Computer fraud 438w
Conferences, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 683-4w
Conferences, Northern Ireland Office 431-2w
Cosmetic surgery, Private health services 425w
Criminal investigation 266w
Diplomatic service, Private education 321-5w
Duty free allowances 955
Flood control, Greater London 424-5w
Housing standards 294w
India, Nuclear non proliferation 397-8w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 411w
Judiciary, Public appointments 405-6w
Publications, Retail trade 510w
Schools, Electronic mail 494w

Pre-school education
Finance 585w
Scotland 585w
Welsh language 444w

Prescott, Rt Hon John, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Lincolnshire 346
Anthrax 347
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 348
Dairy farming 347
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Annual reports 147w
Drug crimes, Luton 346
EC economic policy 351
Economic situation 352
Educational finance 350
Educational finance, Essex 351-2
Greenbelt, Hertfordshire 352
Holiday leave 352
Interest rates 348

Prescott, Rt Hon John—*continued*
Local government finance 145-6w
London Underground 611-2w
Minimum wage 347-8, 350-1
Northern Ireland government 344-6
Nuclear disarmament 349-50
Nuclear weapons policy 349
Official engagements 273w
Referendums, Greater London 349
Regional development agencies 346
Transport, Croydon 345

Prescribing Supply and Administration of Medicines Review Team
578w

Prescription charges
126w, 732w
Oral contraceptives 731-2w

Prescription drugs
124w
Children 613-4w
Elderly 371-2w

Prescriptions
Benzodiazepines 615w
Prozac 372w

Presidential elections
Nigeria 155

Prestwick Airport
583

Prevention of Delay in Trials Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1148

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989
Questions
638-9w, 648w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 616, 682-7
Questions
Advance corporation tax 696w
Betting and gaming duties 246-7w, 694w
Budget, Environmental policy 38w, 245w, 624w
Budget March 1998, Air pollution control 42w
Budget March 1998, Family income 959
Capital gains tax 245w, 399w
Child care tax credit 35w, 242-3w, 398-9w
Customs and Excise, Contracts 246w
Disability living allowance 699w
Disabled person's tax credit, Disability living allowance 245w
Duty free allowances 697w
Family credit, Owner occupied housing 41w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 147-8w, 957-8
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Rural areas 149-50w
Income tax 400-2w
Income tax, Derbyshire 696w
Income tax, Pensioners 150w
Inheritance tax 252-3w, 400w
Inheritance tax, Historic buildings 618-9w
Inheritance tax, Public access 251-2w
Inland Revenue, Manpower 700w
Inland Revenue, Millennium compliance 150w, 621-3w
Marginal tax rates 36-7w
Married personal allowance 620-2w
National insurance contributions 147w, 243w
Overseas investment, Gaming clubs 41w
Personal income, Pensioners 37-8w
Personal savings, Tax yields 241-2w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—*continued*
Personal tax allowances 620-2w
Retail prices index 254w
Road tax 245-6w
Smuggling 254w
Smuggling, Industry 399-400w
Smuggling, Radioactive materials 623w
Tax allowances, Day care of children 623w
Tax allowances, Pensioners 254w
Tax allowances, Tuition fees 700-1w
Tax evasion, Hackney 624w
Tax harmonisation, Fuels 400w
Tax yields 36w
Taxation, Mobility allowance 242w
VAT, Herbs and spices 623-4w
VAT, Medical equipment 41w
Winter fuel payments 697w
Working families tax credit 398w, 619w
Working families tax credit, Employment opportunities 35-6w

Primary education
Finance 225w

Primary health care
684w
Midwives 369w
Scotland 581-2

Primates
Animal experiments 26w

Prime Minister
Civil servants 675w
Information officers (24.04.98) 1152-60
Official hospitality 68w

Prime Minister's questions
17

Prior, Mr David
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 126
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 212-4

Prison accommodation
Young offenders 23-4w

Prison discipline
Afro-Caribbeans 636w
Maze Prison 435w

Prison education services
266-7w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 261w

Prison medical services
Lewes Prison 26w
Nurses 533w

Prison Officers' Association
Industrial disputes 561w

Prison population
520-2w
Drug crimes 257-8w, 705w
Homicide 257-8w
Young offenders 512w

Prison sentences
Drug crimes 24-5w

Prison Service Security Review
535w

Prisoners
Army in Northern Ireland 814-5
China 88w
Civil rights 516w
Drug abuse 531w
North West region 705w
Restraint techniques 636w

Prisoners on remand
Deviance and behaviour disorders 677-8w
Young offenders 512-3w, 705-6w

Prisoners' release
Life imprisonment 183w
Northern Ireland 182w, 436w

Prisons
Construction 258w
Ministers' domestic visits 535w
Small claims 515-6w
Television 534-5w

Prisons Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Prisons

Private companies
BBC 564w

Private education
Diplomatic service 321-5w

Private finance initiative
243w
Bridgend Prison 518w
Dept of Trade and Industry 355w
Fazakerley Prison 518w
Road tolls 11-2w

Private health services
363-4w
Cosmetic surgery 425w

Private Hire Vehicles (London) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for Com read (24.04.98) 1148

Private Members' bills
35w

Private rented housing
708w
Multiple occupation 709w

Private sector
Building regulations 427w

Probation and aftercare
705-6w

Procurement
Environment protection 69-70w

Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997
Questions
306w

Project Al Yamamah
Offset arrangements 557-8w

Property development
Llanrwst 104-5w

Proscribed organisations
Army in Northern Ireland 180w, 272w
Weapons 702w

Prosecutions
Domestic violence 259w

Prozac
Prescriptions 372w

Psychiatric nurses
Community health services 370w

Public access
Inheritance tax 251-2w
Registration of births deaths and marriages 249w

Public Analyst Services Review Group
672w

Public appointments
Action 2000 58w
Boundary Commission for Wales 635w
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust 125w
Church Commissioners 446-9w
Commission for Racial Equality 702w
Countryside Commission 8w
Disability Rights Task Force 595-6w

Public appointments—continued
Dyfed Powys Health Authority 441w
Health authorities 614w
Judiciary 405-6w
Northern Ireland Life Sentence Review Board 182w
Parades Commission 188w
Regional development agencies 286w
Skills Task Force 723-4w
Wales 315w, 444-5w

Public expenditure
38-40w
Home Office 260w
Scotland 454-6w

Public footpaths
Handicapped 293-4w

Public houses
Non-domestic rates 8w

Public interest
Administration of justice 602w
Northern Ireland 602w

Public Interest Disclosure Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1124-44

Public petitions
Countryside (06.04.98) 132, (07.04.98) 261, (24.04.98) 1073
Heathrow Airport (08.04.98) 452

Public places
Music 369w
Smoking 371w

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
Performance standards 76-7w

Public records
Disclosure of information 467w

Public Records (Amendment) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (24.04.98) 1149

Public relations
Northern Ireland Office 434-5w

Public sector borrowing requirement
696w
EC countries 696w

Public sector debt
697w

Public sector housing
Northern Ireland 180w

Public service broadcasting
Digital broadcasting 565w

Public transport
Expenditure 288w, 311-2w, 653w
Handicapped 421-2w
Investment 957-8
Rural areas 302w, 312w
Wales 311-2w, 653w

Public utilities
Fees and charges 616w
Millennium compliance 349-50w
Regulatory systems 61w, 616w

Publications
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 633w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 553-6w
Retail trade 510w

Publicity
Educational policy 336w
Winter fuel payments 727-8w

Pupil exclusions
343-4w

Pupil exclusions—continued
Easington 497w
Leicestershire 497-8w
Scotland 461w
West Midlands 344w

Pupil-teacher ratios
Educational psychology 498-500w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Questions
Entertainment licensing 533w

Quarrying
Aggregates 10w

Questionnaires
Common fisheries policy 666w

Quin, Ms Joyce, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Altcourse Prison 260-1w
Bridgend Prison, Private finance initiative 518w
Civil rights, Prisoners 516w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Prison education services 261w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Suicide 511-2w
HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Departmental publications 256w
Home detention curfews 261-2w
Immigration, Advisory services 174-5w
Lewes Prison, Prison medical services 26w
Magistrates' courts, Arrest warrants 706w
Maidstone Prison 535w
Parc Prison 260w
Police authorities, Finance 516-8w
Prison education services 266-7w
Prison medical services, Nurses 533w
Prison Officers' Association, Industrial disputes 561w
Prison population 520-2w
Prison population, Drug crimes 705w
Prison Service Security Review 535w
Prisons, Construction 258w
Prisons, Ministers' domestic visits 535w
Prisons, Television 534-5w
Probation and aftercare 705-6w
Small claims, Prisons 515-6w
Television licences, Fine defaulters 518w
UK Detention Services, Contracts 517w
Young offender institutions 706w
Young offenders 21-3w
Young offenders, Prison accommodation 23-4w
Young offenders, Prison population 512w
Young offenders, Prisoners on remand 512-3w, 705-6w

Quinn, Mr Lawrie
Questions
Cattle tracing system 486-7w
Local Government Staff Commission England 145w

Racial harassment
Army 51w

Radiation
Cellular phones 433w

Radiation hazards
Chatham Dockyard 50w
HMS Dreadnought 468w
Northern Ireland 433w

Radio Teilifis Eireann
432-3w

Radioactive materials
Central Asia 645w
Eastern Europe 645w

***Radioactive materials**—continued*
Smuggling 398w, 534w, 616-7w, 623w, 682-3w

Radioactive waste disposal
825-7
Japan 66-7w
Sellafield 303w, 433w
Wales 101-2w

Radioactive wastes
824-5
Dounreay 511w, 720w, 818
Land pollution 283w
Orders and regulations 351-2w
Scotland 824

RAF Menwith Hill
Telephone tapping 9-10

Railway accidents
Glynde 417w

Railway freight transport
10w
Channel tunnel 348

Railway network
Channel tunnel 143w, 287-8w, (08.04.98) 296-8, 422w

Railway safety
Channel tunnel 287w

Railway stations
Handicapped 8-9w
Wrexham 573w

Railway transport
(20.04.98) 535-6
Cairngorms 110w, 720w
Wales 441-2w

Rammell, Mr Bill
Questions
Economic and monetary union 956
Educational finance, Essex 351-2

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 994
Questions
Air force bases 45w
Millennium compliance, EC action 349w
Ministers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 395w
Railway transport, Cairngorms 720w
World Cup, Tickets 818-20

Rapson, Mr Syd
Questions
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 692-3w

Rate arrears
Inner London boroughs 299-300w

***Raynsford, Mr Nick**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
National House Building Council (22.04.98) 795-800
Town and country planning, Vale of York (22.04.98) 788-91
Questions
Aggregates, Quarrying 10w
Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, Information 289w
Building industry, Consumer protection 15-6w
Building regulations 16-7w
Building regulations, Industrial health and safety 551w
Building regulations, Private sector 427w
Business premises, Valuation 428w
Bye laws 420w

***Raynsford, Mr Nick**—continued*
Charities, Non-domestic rates 8w
Civic dignitaries, Greater London 427w
Construction materials, Health hazards 611w
Council house rents 5w, 707w
Council house sales, Coventry 12w
Council tax 613w
Derelict land 290w
Derelict land, Planning permission 418w
Development land tax 425w
Fly posting, Local authority powers 13-4w
Greater London Authority, Finance 146-7w
Housing construction, Regional planning and development 424w
Housing Corporation, Rents 708w
Housing standards 294w
Landlords 16w
Local authorities, Performance standards 303w
Local government services, Competition 288w
Local government staff, Inner London boroughs 299-300w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 231-2w
Ministerial Task Group on the Home Buying Process 424w
Non-domestic rates 612-3w
Planning permission 426w
Planning permission, Sunderland 303w
Private rented housing 708w
Private rented housing, Multiple occupation 709w
Public houses, Non-domestic rates 8w
Rate arrears, Inner London boroughs 299-300w
Standard spending assessments 613w
Structure plans, Transport policy 709w
Subsidence, Compensation 426w
Town and country planning 296-7w, 419w
Town and country planning, Environmental impact assessment 423w
Uniform business rate 420w

Rear seat belts
611w

Recess motions
(08.04.98) 269-310, (24.04.98) 1151

Recruitment
Regional development agencies 423w

Recycled Content of Newsprint Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1148

Recycling
301-2w
Domestic electrical appliances 67w
Newsprint 353w
Plastics 143-4w

Redundancy
Manufacturing industries 161-2w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 82-91, 96, 100-1
Questions
Energy resources 162w
Exchange rates 63w, 245w
Manufacturing industries, Redundancy 161-2w
Millennium compliance, Telephone services 349w

Reed, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 86

***Reed, Mr Andrew**—continued*
Questions
Cleft palate 575-6w
Hip replacements, Wales 574-5w
Physical education 492-3w
Post Office 63w

Referendums
Finance 426-7w
Greater London 349, 426-7w
Northern Ireland 181w, 270w, (22.04.98) 930-40

Reform of Quarantine Regulations Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1150

Refugees
Abortion 412-3w, 634w
Bhutan 90w
Death 412w
Health aid 411-4w
Maternal mortality 681-2w

Regional development agencies
346, 549w
Civil servants 144w
Public appointments 286w
Recruitment 423w

Regional planning and development
Housing construction 424w

Regional selective assistance
344w, 356w

Registered Establishments (Scotland) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (22.04.98) 829
2R* and rem stages* (24.04.98) 1150

Registered homes
Scotland (22.04.98) 829, (24.04.98) 1150

Registration of births deaths and marriages
Disclosure of information 701w
Public access 249w

Regulatory systems
Public utilities 61w, 616w
Security industry 172w

***Reid, Dr John**, Minister for the Armed Forces*
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 979-94, 1002, 1012, 1038, 1056-62
Armed forces, Points of order (06.04.98) 21
Army bases, York (22.04.98) 780-3
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 315-8
Questions
Agent 15, Defence research 650w
Air accidents, Disclosure of information 55w
Air force bases 45w
Air Training Corps 50w
Anthrax 465-6w
Armed forces 467w
Armed forces, Alcoholism 278-9w
Armed forces, Criminal proceedings 54-5w
Armed forces, Social class 50-1w
Armed forces deployment 55w
Armed forces deployment, Germany 47w
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 49w
Armed forces deployment, USA 219-20w
Armed forces recruitment, Ethnic minorities 45-6w
Armed forces reserves 276w
Armed forces training 57-8w
Armed forces training, Shoeburyness 51w

Reid, Dr John*—*continued
Armed forces women, Equal opportunities 49w
Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency, Closures 276w
Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency, Performance standards 274-5w
Army Board 468w
Army in Northern Ireland 650-1w
Army in Northern Ireland, Death 462-5w
Conventional weapons 52w
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, Performance standards 274w
Defence land, Armed forces training 46w
Defence Postal and Courier Services, Performance standards 275w
Defence Transport and Movements Executive, Performance standards 275-6w
Devonport Dockyard, Repairs and maintenance 282w
Exservicemen, Complaints 53-4w
Force Research Unit 281w
Gulf War syndrome 7-8, 48-9w, 282-3w, 650w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 47-8w
Military aircraft, Aircrew 221w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 692-3w
Military law, Capital punishment 694w
Ministry of Defence Police 49w
Ministry of Defence Police, Salisbury Plain 466-7w
Nelson, Brian 281w
Officer Training Corps 220w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Defence 280w
Ordnance Disposal School Chattendon 281w
RAF Menwith Hill, Telephone tapping 9-10
Royal yacht, Repairs and maintenance 53w
Territorial Army 15, 46w
Territorial Army, Army strength 14-5, 46-8w
Territorial Army, Wales 445w
WE 177 nuclear bomb, Armed forces training 468w
WE 177 nuclear bomb, Nuclear weapons deployment 467w
WE 177 nuclear bomb, Transport of radioactive materials 467-8w

Religion
Millennium Exhibition 478

Religious freedom
Christianity 88-9w

Relocation of employees
Central Science Laboratory 232w
Civil service agencies 144w
Government Communications Headquarters 397w

Remploy
Defence contracts 716w

Rendel, Mr David
Questions
Child Support Agency 376-7w
Firearms 514w
Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, Civil proceedings 514w
Handicap benefits, Elderly 542w
Income support, Social security benefits disqualification 391w
Lone parents, Income support 539w
Lone parents, Scotland 538w
Lone parents, Social security benefits 388-91w
Maintenance, Children 374-6w
Pension Provision Group 536-7w

Rendel, Mr David*—*continued
Pensions Education Working Group 539-40w
Social security abuse 543w
Social security abuse, Hackney 392w
Social security claims 373w
Tax evasion, Hackney 624w

Rent arrears
Inner London boroughs 299-300w

Rents
Housing Corporation 708w

Repatriation
Croatia 147

Reprography
Industrial health and safety 304-5w

Republic of Ireland
Constitutions 269w
Tourism 676-7w

Research councils
65-6w

Research finance
Astronomy 616w

Reserve Forces Act 1996
Questions
276w

Residential care
Inspections 115-6w

Respiratory diseases
Coal mining 359w

Respite care
124w
Handicapped children 195-6w

Restraint techniques
Prisoners 636w

Retail prices index
254w
Inflation 699-700w

Retail trade
Fireworks 359-60w, 562-3w
Publications 510w
Tobacco 267w
Untreated milk 673w
Vitamin B6 234w, 569w

Retirement pensions
British residents abroad 604w
Expenditure 385-6w
National insurance contributions 377w
Social security recipients 386-7w

Reviews
Coal 511w
Milk Development Council 487-8w

Right of silence
Northern Ireland 648-9w

Rights of way
Handicapped 302w

Road accidents
Cycling 298w
Death 372w
Diabetes 547w
Northern Ireland 270-1w
Pedestrians 297-300w

Road construction
A380 550w
Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass 549-50w
Leicester 427-8w

Road freight transport
Power industry 548-9w

Road safety
(08.04.98) 298-300
Wales 313w

Road tax
245-6w
Tax yields 550-1w

Road tolls
Private finance initiative 11-2w
Urban areas 145w

Road traffic
Northern Ireland 270-1w

Road traffic control
A550 313w
Wales 314w

Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
3R (24.04.98) 1074-123

Road works
7-8w, 610w
Construction materials 310-1w
Expenditure 288w
M25 550w
Wales 310-1w

Roads
Scotland 583w
Wales 103-4w, 443w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 885-6
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1075, 1079, 1081, 1086, 1090, 1093, 1100-2, 1113
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 33, 42, 46, 57-61, 67, 72
Questions
Advance corporation tax 696w
Chemical and biological warfare, Persian Gulf 12
Firearms, Compensation 19-20w
Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, Enforcement 19w
House of Commons voting methods, Electronic voting 18-20
Road works 7-8w
Sinn Fein 341-2
UK Sports Institute 452w

Robertson, Rt Hon George*, *Secretary of State for Defence
Questions
Aircraft carriers 4-5
Aircraft carriers, Defence procurement 4
Armed forces deployment, Germany 1-3
Armed forces deployment, Gulf states 12
Armed forces deployment, Middle East 56-7w
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 11, 46w
Armoured fighting vehicles, Defence procurement 649-50w
Arms exports, Export licensing 6-7
Chemical and biological warfare, Persian Gulf 12
Defence expenditure 6
Defence procurement 5-6
Defence research 6
European fighter aircraft, Costs 51w
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 12-3
NATO, Russia 50w
NATO enlargement 281-2w
Royal Naval College, Ministers' domestic visits 51w
Royal yacht 274w
Upholder class submarines, Canada 56w
War crimes, Iraq 13

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Debates etc.
Deregulation of Racecourses Bill, 1R (21.04.98) 596-8
Horse racing (21.04.98) 596-8
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 497
Questions
Church of England, Human rights 534w
Government Communications Headquarters, Relocation of employees 397w
Northern Ireland Assembly 268w
Overseas investment, Gaming clubs 41w
Personal savings, Tax yields 241-2w
Public utilities, Regulatory systems 616w

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey, Paymaster General
Questions
Capital gains tax, Personal equity plans 244-5w
Individual savings accounts, Tax allowances 244w
Individual savings accounts, Tax yields 244w
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, Government shareholding 561w
Personal equity plans, Tax allowances 243-4w
Private finance initiative 243w
Welfare to work 959-60
Windfall tax 960

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 837, 847, 860-1, 866, 870, 906-7, 910-2, 923-6
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 931-6

Roche, Mrs Barbara, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 73-7
Questions
Action 2000 350-1w
Action 2000, Members' correspondence 349w
Action 2000, Public appointments 58w
Arms exports, Export licensing 346-7w, 508w
Arms trade, Indonesia 345-6w
Asbestos, EC external trade 156w
Asbestos, Imports 157w
Asbestos, Manufactured goods 156-8w
Bilderberg Group 353w
EC grants and loans 162-3w, 330w, 355-6w
Electric shock equipment, Members' correspondence 330w
Electronic mail 345w
Export Control Organisation, Performance standards 60-1w
Export credit guarantees 64-5w, 159w
Export credit guarantees, Human rights 65w
Export Forum Working Group 510-1w
Export licensing 59-60w
Export licensing, Administrative delays 59w
Export licensing, Departmental coordination 346w
Exports 351w
Exports, Exchange rates 348w
Exports, India 351w
International trade, Internet 347-8w
Millennium compliance, Consultants 349w

Roche, Mrs Barbara—continued
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 61w, 161w
Public utilities, Millennium compliance 349-50w
Regional selective assistance 344w, 356w
Textiles, Russia 61-2w
Trade fairs 158w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 169
NHS trusts, Gwent (08.04.98) 319
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 315

Rogers of Riverside Task Force
see Urban Task Force

Rooker, Mr Jeff, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Dorset (20.04.98) 568-74
Questions
Agricultural products, Prices 213w
Animal feed, Antibiotics 79-80w
Animal feed, Testing 487w
Animal quarantine 83w, 488w
Animal welfare, Research 469-70w
Bananas, Developing countries trade 492w
Beef premiums 82w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 81w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 81w, 212-3w, 218w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 570w
Cattle, Canada 214w
Central Science Laboratory 214-7w, 235w
Central Science Laboratory, Financial targets 572w
Central Science Laboratory, Income 214w
Central Science Laboratory, Institute of Food Research 235-6w
Central Science Laboratory, Legal costs 492w
Central Science Laboratory, Relocation of employees 232w
Common agricultural policy 80-1w, 217-8w
Food, Research 217-8w, 232-4w
Food Standards Agency 85w, 570-1w
Genetically modified organisms, EC action 82w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 82w
Hill livestock allowances 571w
Home Grown Cereals Authority 571w
Intervention stocks 217w
Meat, Imports 490-2w
Meat Hygiene Service, Expenditure 488w
Milk, Prices 491w
Milk Development Council, Reviews 487-8w
Organophosphates 84w, 491w
Organophosphates, Licensing 718-9w
Organophosphates, Medical research 213w, 233-4w
Pesticide residues, Research 84-5w
Pesticides, Costs 85w
Pesticides, Food contamination 84w
Public Analyst Services Review Group 672w
Sheep, Export of live animals 488-90w
Sheep, Prices 492w
Sheep dipping 219w
Slaughterhouses, Waste disposal 487w
Veterinary drugs, Food contamination 85-6w
Vitamin B6 81w
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 234w, 569w
Vitamin B6, USA 570w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Conditions of employment, Young people 361w
Flexitime 627w
Homeworking 627-8w
Labour market, Departmental publications 630w
Part-time employment 625-6w, 628-30w
Work sharing 629w
Working hours 626w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Environment Agencies Legislation Review 240-1w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 150-1, 812
Social Exclusion Unit, Scotland 584-5

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 841-2, 849, 863-8, 890-3, 895-900, 903, 908-9, 919, 922, 927-8
Questions
Banks, Northern Ireland 190w
Community regeneration initiative special project, Northern Ireland 189-90w
Driving licences, Northern Ireland 190w
Energy prices, Northern Ireland 188-9w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 189w
Motor vehicle registration, Fees and charges 289w
Northern Ireland government 340-1
Northern Ireland Water Service Agency 183-8w
Parades Commission, Public appointments 188w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel, Railway network (08.04.98) 296-8
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 346-7w
Housing construction, Derelict land 291-2w
Smuggling 254w
Social security reform 605w
Town and country planning 296-7w
Urban Task Force 297-8w

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Questions
EC grants and loans, Wales 803
Literacy, Wales 712w
Supported employment programme 493w

Roy, Mr Frank
Questions
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 385w
Local government reform, Ethics 674w
Social Exclusion Unit, Scotland 583-4

Royal Naval College
Ministers' domestic visits 51w

Royal parks
Cycleways 451w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
341, 343-4, 434w
Codes of practice 435w
Performance standards 181w
Personal records 602-3w
UN Commission on Human Rights 91w

Royal yacht
274w
Repairs and maintenance 53w

Ruane, Mr Chris
Questions
BC grants and loans, Wales 803-4

Ruffley, Mr David
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 643-4, 652, 663, 665-9
Questions
Economic and monetary union 148w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Ministerial policy advisors 589
Tax burden, Families 965-6

Runaway children
27w

Rural areas
Hydrocarbon oil duties 149-50w
Public transport 302w, 312w
School closures 97-100w

"Rural Wales and the Agricultural Crisis"
804-5

Rural workers
Wales 656w

Russell, Bob
Questions
Bus services, Pension funds 294-5w
Football 450w
Immunology, Medical research 117w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 592
Nigeria, Democracy 201w
Nigeria, Deportation 154
Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill 1997/98 34w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
Armed forces women, Equal opportunities 49w
Film distribution 461
Territorial Army 15

Russia
NATO 50w
Overseas aid 411w
Textiles 61-2w

Safety measures
Jet skis 286-7w

Safety standards
Millennium Exhibition 78w
Toys and games 358-9w

St Aubyn, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 640, 645, 647, 652, 662-6, 669, 671-2
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1136-9
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1123
Questions
New deal schemes, Wales 807-8

Salisbury Plain
Ministry of Defence Police 466-7w

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group
234-5w, 489-90w, 665w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Questions
Economic policy, Scotland 583w
Grampian Police 578
Lockerbie, Bombings 588

Salter, Mr Martin
Questions
Meteorological Office, Performance standards 714w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Questions
A380, Road construction 550w
Armed forces, Alcoholism 278-9w
Driving, Diabetes 548w

Sarwar, Mr Mohammad
Questions
Diplomatic relations 397w
Physical education, Scotland 462w
Pupil exclusions, Scotland 461w
Scottish Development Agency, Environment protection 461w
Sports facilities, Scotland 462w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 271-2w
Grampian Police 577

Sawford, Mr Phil
Questions
Extractive industries, Environmental impact assessment 163w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Economic forecasting 623w

School closures
Rural areas 97-100w
Scotland 107-8w, 583w
Staffordshire 501-2w
Wales 97-100w

School transport
Essex (08.04.98) 277-8

Schools
Electronic mail 494w
European Communities 333-4w
Inspections 227w
Parking 421w
Sports facilities 462w

Scotland
Abortion 582w
Accidents 107w
Advisory services 175w
Agency nurses 114w
Agricultural subsidies 460-1w
Air pollution control 584-5w
Air transport 106w
Beef 577-8
Bus services 587-8w
Complaints against local government 674w
Council housing 583w
Council tax 585-6w
Cricket 471
Crimes against the person 617w
Criminal proceedings 576-7
Day care of children 584w
Dept for Education and Employment 340w
Diesel fuel 582w
Diseases 170w
Drug abuse 113w, 459w
Economic policy 583w
Educational finance 581w
Emergency services 582-3
Employment policy 583-4w
Farm incomes 584
Ferries 582w
Fire services 457w
Fish farming 107w, 167-70w
Fisheries 572w
Fluoridation 575-6
Foreign investment in UK 581w
Grazing land 459-60w
Hazardous wastes 108-9w
Hedges and ditches 461w
Higher education admission 169-70w
Hospital admissions 110-2w
Hospital waiting lists 113-4w, 580

Scotland—continued
Integrated administration and control system 108w
Local education authorities 585w
Local enterprise companies 458-60w
Lone parents 538w
Mentally disadvantaged 618w
Museums and galleries 455-6w
New deal schemes 586-7
NHS trusts 579-81
Nurses 114-6w
Osteoporosis 106-7w
Petrol 582w
Physical education 462w
Pre-school education 585w
Primary health care 581-2
Public expenditure 454-6w
Pupil exclusions 461w
Radioactive wastes 824
Registered homes (22.04.98) 829, (24.04.98) 1150
Roads 583w
School closures 107-8w, 583w
Sentencing 585-6
Social Exclusion Unit 583-5
Sports facilities 462w
Student loans 588w
Tourist boards 586-7w
Universities 658w
Vocational guidance 587

Scotland Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Business questions (20.04.98) 502
Questions
824
Legislative drafting 588

Scottish Development Agency
Environment protection 461w

Scottish Enterprise
Environment protection 461w

Scottish Office
Land ownership and tenure 164-5w
Millennium compliance 584w
Non-departmental public bodies 165-8w
Secretaries of state 71w

Scottish Parliament
582-3w
Parliamentary buildings 165-6w, 581w
Women 588-9

Screening
Breast cancer 193-4w, 369-70w
Cervical cancer 125w, 505w, 614-5w

Sea pollution
Offshore drilling 154-6w

Seagate
Northern Ireland 645-6w

Seaham
Disability living allowance 639w
Incapacity benefit 222-3w
Skill shortages 589w

Second homes
Wales 104w

Secondary education
Glasgow 588w
Wiltshire (22.04.98) 941-8

Secretaries of State
Scottish Office 71w
Welsh Office 71w

Secure accommodation
Young offenders 634-5w

Security
Maze Prison 267-8w
Northern Ireland 343-4

Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry
601-2w

Security industry
Regulatory systems 172w

Security Service
see MI5

Security Vetting Appeals Panel
675-6w

Select committee reports
House of Commons debates 35w

Self defence
Homosexuality 636w

Self-assessment of tax
700w

Sellafield
Radioactive waste disposal 303w, 433w

Sentencing
Scotland 585-6

Serbia
Arms embargoes 687-8w

Sexual offences
532w
Data banks 704w

Shareholders
Mass media 58-9w

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Chatham Dockyard, Radiation hazards 50w
HMS Dreadnought, Radiation hazards 468w

Sheep
Export of live animals 488-90w
Prices 492w

Sheep dipping
219w

Sheep meat
Wales 655w

Sheep premiums
82w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 82-3, 94, 97
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 570w
Development land tax 425w
Educational institutions, Finance 660w
Export Forum Working Group 510-1w
Exports 351w
Exports, India 351w
Local broadcasting 465-6
Millennium Exhibition, Design 472
Mink 425w
Planning permission 426w
Subsidence, Compensation 426w
Tipping of waste, Pollution monitoring 416-7w
Training and enterprise councils, Export promotion 501w

Sheffield
Low flying 222w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 617-20
Questions
Interest rates, Sterling 952
Israel, Peace negotiations 142

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Debates etc.
Business questions (20.04.98) 479

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian—continued
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 835
Questions
Business statements 969-71
Northern Ireland government 344-5

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 533-4
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1144

Shipley, Ms Debra
Questions
Domestic violence, Prosecutions 259w
Domestic violence, West Midlands 21w, 259w

Shipping accidents
Inquiries 415-6w

Shipping Working Group
see Merchant Shipping Working Group

Shoeburyness
Armed forces training 51w

Short, Rt Hon Clare, Secretary of State for International Development
Questions
Banking supervision 407-8w
Bhutan, Overseas aid 18w
Caribbean, Drug crimes 409w
Central Europe, Poverty 410w
Colombia, Overseas aid 18w
Developing countries, Civil service 409-10w
Development aid, Economic and monetary union 414w
EC aid 414w
EC aid, Disclosure of information 633-4w
Educational aid 17w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 411w
Land ownership and tenure 411w
Overseas aid 408-11w
Overseas aid, Children 414-5w
Overseas aid, Departmental coordination 679-80w
Overseas aid, Tobacco industry 17-8w
Poverty 408-9w, 678w
Refugees, Abortion 412-3w, 634w
Refugees, Death 412w
Refugees, Health aid 411-4w
Refugees, Maternal mortality 681-2w
Russia, Overseas aid 411w
Smuggling, Radioactive materials 682-3w
South Africa, Land ownership and tenure 409w
Sustainable development 678-9w
Swaziland, Overseas aid 680-2w
Zimbabwe, Land ownership and tenure 410w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
A47 (21.04.98) 724
Air force (23.04.98) 993, 1012-3, 1018-23, 1027, 1042, 1046
Questions
Foreign policy, Ethics 198w
Ministry of Defence, Libraries 55-6w
Territorial Army, Army strength 14-5

Singapore
Ministers' visits abroad 556w

Sinn Fein
341-2

Sites of special scientific interest
12w

Skill shortages
City of Durham 501w
Seaham 589w

Skills Task Force
Public appointments 723-4w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Intervention during questions after statement (08.04.98) 358
Local government finance, Derbyshire (08.04.98) 280-2
Ministerial statements, Points of order (22.04.98) 829
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 170
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 24, 28
Questions
Business questions 977-8
Exchange rates 694w, 967-8
House of Lords reform 145
Legal aid, Trade unions 568w
Lottery distributors 469-70

Skye bridge
239-40w

Slaughterhouses
Wales 211w
Waste disposal 487w

Small businesses
Millennium compliance 91-2w
Northern Ireland 268w

Small claims
Prisons 515-6w

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew, Minister for Employment and Disability Rights, Dept for Education and Employment
Questions
EC Labour and Social Affairs Council 596-7w
Employment policy 686w
Employment Service, New deal schemes 337w
Environmental Task Force 429-31w
Environmental Task Force, Stoke on Trent 337w
International Labour Organisation, Child workers 225w
Jobcentres, Repairs and maintenance 589-91w
New deal for young unemployed 92w, 588-90w, 684w
New deal schemes 501w
New deal schemes, Hexham 339w
New deal schemes, South West Hertfordshire 338w
New deal schemes, Stoke on Trent 336-7w
New deal schemes, Wellingborough 339w

Smith, Angela
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 449
Questions
Fire services, Manpower 534w
Fraud, Law reform 176-7w

Smith, Rt Hon Chris, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 162-72, 175, 177, 180-1, 198, 202, 246
Questions
Cricket 470-1
Cricket, Scotland 471
Cricket, Women 471
Culture, National income 139w
Local broadcasting 465-6
Lottery distributors 141w, 469-70

***Smith, Rt Hon Chris**—continued*
Lottery distributors, West Midlands 468-9
Mass media, Ownership 450w, 465-8
Millennium Commission, Staffordshire 34w
Millennium Commission, Tourism 565-6w
Millennium Exhibition 566w
Museums and galleries, Dudley 465
National Lottery, Finance 450w, 469
Television, Sports 229-30w
Theatres, Greater London 230w

Smith, Miss Geraldine
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 362
Questions
Lifeboats, Liverpool 426w
Transport of radioactive materials 426w

Smith, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1049
NHS trusts, Gwent (08.04.98) 324
Questions
Boundary Commission for Wales, Public appointments 635w
New deal schemes, Wales 809

Smith, Mr Llew
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 708
NHS trusts, Gwent (08.04.98) 319-23
Questions
Anthrax 465-6w
Defence land, Land pollution 283w
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 511w, 720w
Environmental Task Force, Wales 444w
Gwent Tertiary College 654w
Gwent Tertiary College, EC grants and loans 93-8w, 445w, 692w
MMR vaccine 732-3w
New deal schemes, Wales 574w
NHS trusts, Blaenau Gwent 801
Nuclear power, Treaties 70w
Radioactive waste disposal, Japan 66-7w
Radioactive wastes, Orders and regulations 351-2w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 433w
Smuggling, Radioactive materials 398w, 534w, 616–7w, 623w, 682-3w

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 376, 430-1
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 602
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 95
Questions
Grampian Police 586

Smoking
Public places 371w
Women 370w

Smuggling
254w
Industry 399-400w
Radioactive materials 398w, 534w, 616-7w, 623w, 682-3w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 838, 853-4, 866, 868, 870, 891-2, 904
Questions
Business questions 974
Health services 577w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Beekeeping (22.04.98) 756-8
Questions
Armed forces training 57-8w
British Horseracing Board 176w
Business questions 972-3
Defence land, Armed forces training 46w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministers' visits abroad 64w
Farmers, Markets 85w
Gulf War syndrome 8
House of Commons reform of procedure 18
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 156
Israel, UN resolutions 87w
Ministerial statements 34-5w
Territorial Army, Army strength 47w

Social class
Armed forces 50-1w
Higher education admission 334w

Social Exclusion Unit
439w
Scotland 583-5

Social problems
Crime prevention 531-2w

Social security
Market research 223-4w, 607-8w

Social security abuse
543w
Hackney 392w
Housing benefits 384-5w, 391-3w

Social security appeals
Disability living allowance 382w, 640w
Incapacity benefit 382w, 605-6w, 728-9w

Social security benefits
544w
Lone parents 388-91w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Contracts for services 606-7w

Social security benefits disqualification
Income support 391w

Social security benefits overpayment
127-9w
Winter fuel payments 379-82w

Social security benefits rules
Students 685w
Vaccine damaged children 382-3w

Social security claims
373w
Medical examinations 393-4w

Social security payments
Automation 133w

Social security recipients
Incapacity benefit 731w
Retirement pensions 386-7w

Social security reform
605w, 965
Housing benefits 383w
Local government functions 385w

Social services
Elderly 691-2w
Inspections 116w
NHS 206w
Wales 657w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 490
Questions
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 818

Solihull
Motorway service areas 296w

Solvent abuse
34w
Butane gas 265-6w, 576w

Solway Firth
Fishing 240w

South Africa
Land ownership and tenure 409w
Trade agreements 237w, 397w

South West Hertfordshire
New deal schemes 338w

Southern Africa
EC external trade 89-90w
Trade agreements 238w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 669-73
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 879, 883

***Speaker and deputies**, For rulings and statements see separate heading Speaker's rulingsand statements*
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (06.04.98) 22, 82, (20.04.98) 503, 525, 527, (21.04.98) 599, (24.04.98) 1124
Conduct of proceedings (06.04.98) 15, 41, 44, 66, 100, (07.04.98) 224, 239, 267, (08.04.98) 269, 310, 313-4, 325, 332, 407, 415, (20.04.98) 502, 513, 516-7, 521, 526, 548, 565, (21.04.98) 669-70, 672, 677, 686, 698, 704-5, 718, 725-6, (22.04.98) 751, 762, 771, 791, 793, 795, 807, 815, 820, 860, 870, 873, 933, 935, 937, (23.04.98) 973, 992, 1008, (24.04.98) 1079, 1086, 1090, 1093, 1100-1, 1105-7, 1109, 1111, 1113, 1115-6, 1134
Orders and regulations motions (20.04.98) 535, (21.04.98) 721, (22.04.98) 930
Points of order (06.04.98) 21, 45, 49-50, 97, 112, (07.04.98) 157-8, 173, 181, (08.04.98) 310, 369, (21.04.98) 595, 695, 698, 700-1, (23.04.98) 978, 1063, (24.04.98) 1147
Private Members' bill orders (24.04.98) 1147-50
Royal Assent (08.04.98) 364, (23.04.98) 995

Speaker's rulings and statements
House of Commons procedure (24.04.98) 1150
Ministerial statements (22.04.98) 828-9
Parliamentary broadcasting (07.04.98) 158
Ten minutes rule (08.04.98) 370
Unparliamentary expressions (23.04.98) 973

Special education
502w
Autism 659-60w
Wales 713w

Special Educational Needs National Advisory Group
335w

Special hospitals
Hospital waiting lists 125-6w

Special schools
Educational standards 494w

***Spellar, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence*
Questions
Air force, Festivals and special occasions 13-4
Ammunition, Uranium 52w, 221-2w
Armed forces, Clothing 715-7w
Armed forces, Millennium compliance 220-1w
Army, Racial harassment 51w
Army Technical Support Agency, Departmental publications 468-70w
Atomic Weapons Establishment, Departmental publications 552w
AWE Aldermaston 552-3w
Ballistic missile defence 9
Berlin airlift, Festivals and special occasions 14
Challenger tanks 556-7w
Chatham Dockyard, Radiation hazards 50w
Chemical and biological warfare, International cooperation 693-4w, 714-5w
Defence, Malaysia 3-4
Defence contracts, Offset arrangements 557w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 10-1
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Administrative costs 277-8w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Defence contracts 276-7w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Firing ranges 715w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Ministry of Defence Police 52w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Publications 553-6w
Defence Export Services Organisation 279-80w
Defence industries, Diversification 10
Defence land, Land pollution 283w, 467w
Defence procurement 8-9, 50w
Defence research 279w
Defence support agencies, Departmental publications 280-1w
Firing ranges, Pendine 276w
Guided weapons 283-4w
HMS Dreadnought, Radiation hazards 468w
Hydrographic Office, Operating costs 52-4w
Information technology, Ministry of Defence 54w
Low flying, Sheffield 222w
Members' correspondence, Ministry of Defence 282w
Meteorological Office, Performance standards 714w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 470w
Ministers' visits abroad, Singapore 556w
Ministry of Defence, Libraries 55-6w
Mustard gas 467w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 466w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Defence 649w
Offset arrangements, Oman 558w, 711w
Project Al Yamamah, Offset arrangements 557-8w
Public records, Disclosure of information 467w
Remploy, Defence contracts 716w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Questions
Minimum wage, Wales 652-3w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Questions
Economic and monetary union 954

Sponsorship
Millennium Exhibition 318w

Sports
EC action 142w
Television 229-30w, (08.04.98) 294-6

Sports facilities
Local government functions 33w
North Wales 572-3w
Schools 462w
Scotland 462w
Wales 102w

Sportsmark
33w

Spring, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 211, 215, 245-51
Questions
Security, Northern Ireland 343-4
Sportsmark 33w
Territorial Army 46w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Germany 3
NATO, Russia 50w
NATO enlargement 281-2w

Staffordshire
Millennium Commission 34w
School closures 501-2w
Waste management 9w

Standard spending assessments
613w

Standards specifications
Petrol additives 160w

Standards Task Force
574w

Standing Medical Advisory Committee
Aricept 734w

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
East London line 707w
Forced labour 721-2w
Hong Kong, Legislation 722-3w
Human rights, Departmental responsibilities 722w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Questions
Crime, Music 266w
Debts, Developing countries 963-4
Ear disorders, Young people 369w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 815
Midwives, Primary health care 369w
Noise control 295w
Sexual offences, Data banks 704w
Standing Medical Advisory Committee, Aricept 734w

Statistics
Labour market 250-1w
Unemployment 817

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Devon 673w
Fisheries, Departmental correspondence 665w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 54-7
Questions
Members' correspondence, Ministry of Defence 282w
Motor vehicle testing, Fraud 295-6w

Sterling
Interest rates 952

Stevens Inquiry
see Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry

Stewart, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1132
Questions
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Compliance cost assessments 633w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Questions
Breast cancer 45w
Breast cancer, Death 505w
Breast cancer, Screening 193-4w, 369-70w
Kenya, Democracy 325w
New deal schemes, Wellingborough 339w
Police training, Driving instruction 638w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 721w

Stoke on Trent
Environmental Task Force 337w
New deal schemes 336-7w

Storage Equipment Manufacturers Association
Government contracts 566w

Stormont
Construction 676w

Stott, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 840-1, 851, 862, 870, 915
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 37, 42
Questions
Royal Ulster Constabulary 341

***Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin**, Minister of State for Transport, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Questions
Motor vehicle type approval 308-9w
Train operating units, Bicycles 1w

Strategic Communications Unit
72-3w

***Straw, Rt Hon Jack**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 370-80, 384-5
Data Protection Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 529-30
Questions
Anthrax 21w
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council 256-7w
Fraud, Law reform 176-7w
Home Office, Departmental publications 28-32w
Home Office, Public expenditure 260w
Home Office, Theft 263-5w
Immigration controls 255-6w
MI5 25w, 260w
MI5, Disclosure of information 25w
Prisoners, Restraint techniques 636w
UN Committee Against Torture 28w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 701-6

Streeter, Mr Gary*—*continued
Questions
Citizens' First initiative 204-5w
Common agricultural policy 80w
Consumer education, EC grants and loans 236w
Consumer protection, EC grants and loans 327w
Croatia, Repatriation 147
Cultural heritage, EC grants and loans 327w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 823-4
EC grants and loans 328-30w
EC grants and loans, Information services 202-4w
EC grants and loans, Training 327–8w
EC grants and loans, Young people 328w
EC grants and loans, Youth organisations 202-3w
EC integration, EC grants and loans 202-4w
Economic and monetary union 148w
Economic situation 352
Education, EC grants and loans 328w
European Women's Lobby 203w
European Youth Forum 204w
Journalists in Europe, EC grants and loans 203w
Kaleidoscope scheme 326-7w
Our Europe Association 202w

Structure plans
Nottinghamshire 144-5w
Transport policy 709w

Student grants
Married people 658w
Mature students 657-9w

Student loans
597w
Scotland 588w

Students
Debts 658w, 685-6w
Social security benefits rules 685w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Antidumping duties, Cotton (08.04.98) 275-7
Business questions (20.04.98) 479
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 736-9
Members' conduct, Points of order (23.04.98) 978
Questions
Alternative energy 161w
Alternative energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 352w
Budget March 1998, Air pollution control 42w
Business questions 972
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Fund 507w
Energy consumption, Dept of Health 191w
Incinerators 296w

Subsidence
Compensation 426w

Suicide
Farmers 311w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 511-2w
Northern Ireland 271w
Wales 311w, 316w

Sunderland
General practitioners 364-5w
Hospital waiting lists 732w
Planning permission 303w
Winter fuel payments 641-2w

Supermarkets
Closures 356w

Supported employment programme
493w

Surveillance
Police powers 639w

Sustainable development
678-9w
Tourism 451w
Wales 689w

Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 496
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 33, 45-9, 71

Sutton
Jobclubs 502-3w

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
Electricity generation 146w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 439-40
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 670, 676-7
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 230, 240
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 872
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 497
Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill, 3R (24.04.98) 1097, 1099, 1102-3
Questions
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 576-7
Millennium Exhibition, British Sky Broadcasting 477
Post Office Counters 357w
Young offenders, Secure accommodation 634-5w

Swaziland
Overseas aid 680-2w

Swinney, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bank of England Bill, Lords amendts (20.04.98) 510, 519-21
Business questions (20.04.98) 502
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 603, 609
Social Fund, Tayside (07.04.98) 266-7
Questions
British National Space Centre, Operating costs 64w
Dept of Social Security, Civil service agencies 134-5w
NHS trusts, Scotland 580-1
Public expenditure, Scotland 454-6w
Research councils 65-6w
Roads, Scotland 583w
Trade fairs 158w

Syms, Mr Robert
Questions
Personal savings 697w
Road tax, Tax yields 550-1w
Tourism 451-2w

Syrian Arab Republic
(08.04.98) 292-4
Ministers' visits abroad 198w

Tamoxifen
Breast cancer 575-6w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 603, 607
Questions
Cricket 471
European Central Bank 962
Official engagements 273w

Tax allowances
Day care of children 623w
Film industry 467
Individual savings accounts 244w
Pensioners 254w
Personal equity plans 243-4w
Tuition fees 700-1w

Tax burden
Families 965-6

Tax Credits (Initial Expenditure) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (23.04.98) 978
Order relating to Com (24.04.98) 1151

Tax evasion
Criminal proceedings 230-1w
Hackney 624w
Judgments 230-1w

Tax harmonisation
Fuels 400w

Tax yields
36w
Individual savings accounts 244w
Personal savings 241-2w
Road tax 550-1w

Taxation
(21.04.98) 599-694
Mobility allowance 242w
Town and country planning 698w

Taxi fares
Greater London 307w

Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann*, *President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements (20.04.98) 501-2
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 833-5, 841-2
Recess motions (08.04.98) 307-10
Questions
Blair, Tony, Members' attendance 16
Business questions 971-8
Business statements 969-71
House of Commons reform of procedure 18
House of Commons times of sittings 15-6
House of Commons voting methods, Electronic voting 18-20, 395w
Members' allowances, Members' attendance 35w
Members' conduct 17
Members' conduct, Oral questions 17-8
Ministerial statements 34-5w
Opposition parties, Finance 724-6w
Private Members' bills 35w
Select committee reports, House of Commons debates 35w
Solvent abuse 34w
Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill 1997/98 34w

Taylor, Ms Dari
Debates etc.
Army bases, York (22.04.98) 778
Town and country planning, Vale of York (22.04.98) 786

Taylor, Ms Dari—continued
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 46w
Early years development plans, Finance 344w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bypasses, Ashby de la Zouch (08.04.98) 284-7
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 376, 380
Questions
Debts, Developing countries 695-6w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 492
Questions
Defence research 6

Taylor, Rt Hon John D
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council 432w
Fishing vessels, Inspections 395w
Gaelic language, Languages education 178w
Planning permission, Newtownards 603w
UN Human Rights Committee 91w

Taylor, Mr John M
Debates etc.
Football Sponsorship Levy Bill, 1R (07.04.98) 160
Questions
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 704w
Motorway service areas, Solihull 296w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Army Board 468w
Army Technical Support Agency, Departmental publications 468-70w
Atomic Weapons Establishment, Departmental publications 552w
AWE Aldermaston 552-3w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 212-3w
Defence support agencies, Departmental publications 280-1w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 826
Electric shock equipment, Members' correspondence 330w
Nuclear weapons 644w
WE 177 nuclear bomb, Armed forces training 468w
WE 177 nuclear bomb, Nuclear weapons deployment 467w
WE 177 nuclear bomb, Transport of radioactive materials 467-8w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Questions
Ammunition, Uranium 52w
Armed forces training, Shoeburyness 51w
Common agricultural policy 218w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Firing ranges 715w
European Commission, Information services 87w
Grammar schools, Northern Ireland 270w
International Criminal Court 326w
Ordnance Disposal School Chattendon 281w
Private Members' bills 35w
Secondary education, Glasgow 588w

Tayside
Benefits Agency district offices (07.04.98) 262-8

Teacher training
Tuition fees 502w

Teacher Training Agency
Finance 595w

Teachers
Pay settlements 661w

Teachers' pensions
661-2w

Teenage pregnancy
Perinatal mortality 251w
Wakefield 251w

Telephone services
543w
Millennium compliance 349w

Telephone tapping
RAF Menwith Hill 9-10

Television
Income 466-7
Prisons 534-5w
Sports 229-30w, (08.04.98) 294-6

Television licences
Fine defaulters 518w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings and statements (08.04.98) 370

Territorial Army
15, 46w, (08.04.98) 311-8
Army strength 14-5, 46-8w
Wales 445w

Terrorism
638-9w
Northern Ireland 74w, 341-2

Tesco
Planning permission 301w

Textiles
Defence contracts 716w
Russia 61-2w

Thai boxing
Finance 565w

Theatres
Greater London 230w
North West region 33-4w

Theft
Art works 139w
Attorney General 438-9w
Home Office 263-5w
Museums and galleries 139w

Thomas, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 386
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 214-8, 224
Questions
Civil servants, Wales 211w
Court Service, Welsh language 406w
Credit unions 962-3
Gibraltar, Ministerial duties 326w
Meat Hygiene Service, Expenditure 488w
Minimum wage, Northern Ireland 270w
National Assembly of Wales 807
Slaughterhouses, Wales 211w

Thompson, Mr William
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 857, 879-82, 920, 923

Thompson, Mr William—continued
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 936-7
Questions
Beef, Northern Ireland 338

Tickets
World Cup 818-20

Timms, Mr Stephen
Questions
Cash ratios 402w
EC Agriculture Council 212w
Personal pensions, Misrepresentation 247-50w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Questions
Countryside Commission, Public appointments 8w
Millennium Exhibition 474

Tipping of waste
9-10w
Complaints 311w
Derelict land 9w
Pollution monitoring 416-7w
Wales 101w, 311w

Tobacco
Children 267w
Retail trade 267w

Tobacco industry
Overseas aid 17-8w

Todd, Mr Mark
Questions
Afghanistan, Women 325-6w
Council of Mortgage Lenders, Codes of practice 149w
Defence Export Services Organisation 279-80w
Defence research 279w
Kenya, Human rights 395-6w
Legal aid, Personal injury compensation 610w
Piracy 285w
Police authorities, Finance 516-8w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 303w
Tax harmonisation, Fuels 400w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Questions
AIDS, Vaccination 615w
Business questions 976
Civic dignitaries, Greater London 427w
Council house rents 707w
Debts, Developing countries 964
Firearms certificates 20-1w
Hospital consultants, Pay incentives 577w
Housing Corporation, Rents 708w
Postal rates, Europe 710w
Private rented housing 708w
Private rented housing, Multiple occupation 709w
Referendums, Greater London 426-7w
VAT, Herbs and spices 623-4w

Touhig, Mr Don
Questions
Gwent Tertiary College 654w

Tourism
451-2w
Heritage Lottery Fund 565-6w
Income 34w
Millennium Commission 565-6w
Northern Ireland 268w, 676-7w
Republic of Ireland 676-7w
Sustainable development 451w
Wales 712w

Tourist boards
Scotland 586-7w

Tourist information
566-7w

Town and country planning
296-7w, 419w
Environmental impact assessment 423w
Taxation 698w
Vale of York (22.04.98) 784-91

Townend, Mr John
Questions
Fishing quotas 665w

Toys and games
Safety standards 358-9w

Trade agreements
South Africa 237w, 397w
Southern Africa 238w

Trade competitiveness
Paper industry 353-4w

Trade fairs
158w

Trade promotion
73w, 396w
Arts 147-8

Trade union recognition
406w
Opposition days (06.04.98) 22-81

Trade unions
Legal aid 568w

Traffic noise
A13 669-70w

Train operating units
Bicycles 1w
Subsidies 292w, 430w

Training
EC grants and loans 327-8w
Judiciary 404-5w, 609w

Training and enterprise councils
Expenditure 660w
Export promotion 501w
Greater London 685w
North West region 660-1w

Translation services
Family courts 609w

Transport
Croydon 345
Millennium Exhibition 417-8w, 473-4

Transport of radioactive materials
426w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 467-8w

Transport policy
Dept of Trade and Industry 59w
Northern Ireland Office 645w
Structure plans 709w

Travelling people
Educational finance 314-5w, 591-4w

Treaties
Nuclear power 70w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 569w
Vitamin B6, USA 570w

Tree felling
Kingston upon Thames 26w

Trials
Northern Ireland 273w

Trickett, Mr Jon
Questions
Low pay 403w
Teenage pregnancy, Perinatal mortality 251w

Trickett, Mr Jon*—*continued
Teenage pregnancy, Wakefield 251w

Trimble, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 487-8
Questions
Driving instruction, Northern Ireland 75w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Licensing (Amendment) Bill, 1R (07.04.98) 158
Questions
Building regulations, Industrial health and safety 551w
Building regulations, Private sector 427w
Special schools, Educational standards 494w

Tuition fees
658w
Tax allowances 700-1w
Teacher training 502w

Turkey
206w

Turner, Dr Desmond
Questions
Turkey 206w

Turner, Dr George
Debates etc.
A47 (21.04.98) 725
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 84-5

Turner Review group
see Public Analyst Services Review Group

Twigg, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 614, 650-4, 663-4
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 360
Questions
Bank of England 632w

Twigg, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 440-1

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Intervention during Easter recess motion speech (08.04.98) 274
Questions
Central Science Laboratory 235w
Central Science Laboratory, Institute of Food Research 235-6w
Institute of Food Research 352-3w
Opposition parties, Finance 724-6w
Organophosphates 491w
Post traumatic stress disorder, Counselling 372w

Tyne Tunnels Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (08.04.98) 364

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 145-6

UK contributions to EC budget
42w

UK Detention Services
Contracts 517w

UK Sports Institute
452w

Ukraine
Overseas aid 239w

Ulster Unionists
British-Irish Interparliamentary Body 341

UN Commission on Human Rights
Royal Ulster Constabulary 91w

UN Committee Against Torture
28w

UN finances
201-2w

UN Human Rights Committee
91w

UN resolutions
Israel 87w

Underground railways
Handicapped 422w

Unemployment
957
Crime 522-3w
EC countries 956
Northern Ireland 336-7
Statistics 817

Uniform business rate
420w

Universities
Scotland 658w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings and statements (23.04.98) 973

Untreated milk
Retail trade 673w

Upholder class submarines
10
Canada 56w

Uranium
Ammunition 52w, 221-2w

Urban areas
Road tolls 145w

Urban Task Force
297-8w

USA
Armed forces deployment 219-20w
Vitamin B6 569-70w

Vacancies
Chelmsford 228w

Vacant land
290w

Vaccination
AIDS 615w

Vaccine damaged children
Social security benefits rules 382-3w

Vale of York
Town and country planning (22.04.98) 784-91

Valuation
Business premises 428w

Value Added Tax (Supply of Services) (Amendment) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(20.04.98) 535-6

VAT
(20.04.98) 535-6
Contraceptives 615w
Herbs and spices 623-4w
Medical equipment 41w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 387, 423-5
Questions
Anthrax 21w

Vaz, Mr Keith—continued
Army, Racial harassment 51w
Balkans, Ministers' visits abroad 320-1w
Boxing, Women 566w
Drug crimes, Prison sentences 24-5w
Foreign relations 72w
Hospital waiting lists 364w
Immigration Appeal Tribunal, Administrative delays 589-90
Israel, Festivals and special occasions 142w
Mental patients 192-3w
Millennium compliance 72w
Millennium compliance, International cooperation 406w
Pupil exclusions, Leicestershire 497-8w
Road construction, Leicester 427-8w
Television, Sports 229-30w
Trade union recognition 406w

Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994
Questions
289w

Veterinary drugs
Food contamination 85-6w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Museums and galleries, Portsmouth (08.04.98) 282-4
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 219-20
Questions
Mass media, Ownership 465
Probation and aftercare 705-6w

Virtual reality
Millennium Exhibition 478

Vis, Dr Rudi
Questions
Abortion, Barnet 631w
British Transport Police 305w

Vitamin B6
81w, 117w
Retail trade 234w, 569w
USA 569-70w

Vocational guidance
Scotland 587

Voluntary organisations
259w

Voluntary Personal Security Cards Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1150

Voting behaviour
Young people 531w

Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group
703w

Wakefield
Perinatal mortality 251w
Teenage pregnancy 251w

Wales
Accidents 104w
Advisory bodies 690w
Agricultural subsidies 103w, 211w
Agriculture 804-6
Beef 805
Blood 573w
Blood donors 209w
Bovine tuberculosis 210w
Children in care 101w, 207w
Civil servants 211w
Common agricultural policy 653w
Community hospitals 209w
Council house rents 102w
Council tax 652w

Wales—continued
Curriculum 711w
Custodial treatment 530w
Dairy farming 442w, 656-7w
Dairy products 656w
Day care of children 443w, 652w
Development agencies 809-10
Drug abuse 207-8w, 315-7w
EC grants and loans 313w, 652w, 654w, 802-4
Educational standards 574w
Environmental Task Force 444w
Family planning 573w
Farmers 103w
Film industry 691w
Foreign investment in UK 314w, 653w
Forestry 442-3w
Forestry Commission 443w
Health 691-2w, 801-2
Health action zones 691w, 806-7
Health services 657w
Hip replacements 574-5w
Homelessness 654w
Hospital beds 211w
Hospital education 572w
Hospital waiting lists 801
Information technology 311w
Iron and steel industry 310w
Literacy 712w
Local enterprise agencies 317-8w
Local government finance 211w, 655w
Manufacturing industries 653w
Minimum wage 652-3w
Nature conservation 105w
New deal schemes 574w, 652w, 807-9
NHS 206w
NHS trusts 209-10w, 443w, 655w
Non-departmental public bodies 442w
Nurses 692w
Osteoporosis 104w, 212w
Out of town shopping centres 207w
Post offices 439w
Public appointments 315w, 444-5w
Public transport 311-2w, 653w
Radioactive waste disposal 101-2w
Railway transport 441-2w
Road safety 313w
Road traffic control 314w
Road works 310-1w
Roads 103-4w, 443w
Rural workers 656w
School closures 97-100w
Second homes 104w
Sheep meat 655w
Slaughterhouses 211w
Social services 657w
Special education 713w
Sports facilities 102w
Suicide 311w, 316w
Sustainable development 689w
Territorial Army 445w
Tipping of waste 101w, 311w
Tourism 712w
Water authorities 209w

Wallace, Mr James
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 577-8
Bus services, Scotland 587-8w
Coastguard Agency 16w, 552w
Council tax, Scotland 585-6w
Tourist boards, Scotland 586-7w

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Disability working allowance, Departmental forms 641w
Employment Service, New deal schemes 337w

Walley, Ms Joan—continued
Environmental Task Force, Stoke on Trent 337w
Export credit guarantees 64-5w, 159w
Export credit guarantees, Human rights 65w
Export promotion 199w
Export promotion, Ceramic industries 149
Land pollution, Departmental publications 670w
Land pollution, Industrial research 709-10w
New deal schemes, Stoke on Trent 336-7w
Organophosphates, Licensing 718-9w

Walter, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Dorset (20.04.98) 564-5, 573
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, Rep and 3R (24.04.98) 1138-9

War crimes
Iraq 13

War pensions
Nuclear weapons tests 544w

Ward, Ms Claire
Questions
Film industry 451w

Wardle, Mr Charles,
Debates etc.
Manufacturing industries (06.04.98) 108-9, 112-4
Questions
Westminster Foundation for Democracy 144-5

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
National Blood Authority (08.04.98) 358
Questions
EC enlargement, Human rights 152-3

Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1148

Waste disposal
143-4w
EC law 296w
Meat products 212-3w
North West region 416w, 547w, 669w
Slaughterhouses 487w

Waste management
Staffordshire 9w

Waste Minimisation Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R adjourned (24.04.98) 1145-6

Wastes
Packaging 306w

Water authorities
Wales 209w

Water charges
Northern Ireland 183-9w

Water Industry (Amendment) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (24.04.98) 1148

Water Service
see Northern Ireland Water Service Agency

Water supply
Iraq 155-6
Lead 13w, 124-5w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Questions
Community arts, Finance 463-4

Waterson, Mr Nigel—continued
Crown Prosecution Service, Consultants 438w

Watts, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 60
Questions
EC grants and loans 162w
Northern Ireland government 269w

WE 177 nuclear bomb
Armed forces training 468w
Nuclear weapons deployment 467w
Transport of radioactive materials 467-8w

Weapons
Northern Ireland 702w
Proscribed organisations 702w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 624
Questions
Child care tax credit 242-3w
Council house rents 5w
Council house rents, Wales 102w
Great Western Trains, Performance standards 707w
Jobclubs, New deal schemes 226w
Jobseeker's allowance 540-1w
Pensions, Family resources survey 541w

Weights and Measures (Beer and Cider) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (24.04.98) 1147

Welfare milk
Family credit 378w

Welfare to work
696w, 950-1, 958-60
Northern Ireland 336
Pilot schemes 337-8w

Wellingborough
New deal schemes 339w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Questions
Higher education admission, Scotland 169-70w
Student loans 597w
Student loans, Scotland 588w

Welsh Assembly
see National Assembly of Wales

Welsh Development Agency
Development Board for Rural Wales 809

Welsh Grand Committee
(20.04.98) 502, 536

Welsh Health Common Services Authority
Finance 440w, 713-4w
Offices 441w

Welsh language
Adult education 209w
Court Service 406w
Legal Aid Board 406w
Millennium Exhibition 319w
Postal services 574w
Pre-school education 444w

Welsh Office
Flags 102-3w
Offices 440-1w
Secretaries of state 71w

West Midlands
Domestic violence 21w, 259w
Lottery distributors 468-9
Pupil exclusions 344w

Westminster Abbey
Church Commissioners 445w

Westminster Foundation for Democracy
144-5

Weymouth
Land Registry 568w

White, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Crime and Disorder Bill (HL), 2R (08.04.98) 411
National House Building Council (22.04.98) 792-5
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 881-2, 915-6
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 498-9
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 933
Questions
Prison education services 266-7w
Public sector borrowing requirement, EC countries 696w

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Debates etc.
Dibden Bay (23.04.98) 1064-7
Questions
Domestic electrical appliances, Recycling 67w

Whitney, Sir Ray
Debates etc.
Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL), 2R (20.04.98) 542, 546

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
Film distribution 461-2

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Children, Northern Ireland 269w
Referendums, Greater London 349

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Questions
Immigration applications, Administrative delays 535-6w
Maidstone Prison 535w
Prison Officers' Association, Industrial disputes 561w
Prison Service Security Review 535w
Prisons, Ministers' domestic visits 535w
Prisons, Television 534-5w
Young offenders, Prisoners on remand 512-3w

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Debates etc.
Industrial diseases, Compensation (08.04.98) 287-9
Questions
Adult education, Welsh language 209w
Agricultural subsidies, Wales 103w, 211w
Beef premiums 82w
Blood, Wales 573w
Blood donors, Wales 209w
Coal mining, Pension funds 67-8w, 357w
Community hospitals, Wales 209w
Drug abuse, Gwynedd 312w
Drug crimes, Gwynedd 25-6w
EC grants and loans, Wales 313w
Exchange rates, Agriculture 951-2
Family planning, Wales 573w
Hospitals, Porthmadog 208-9w
Judiciary, Training 404-5w
Millennium Exhibition, Welsh language 319w
New deal schemes, Wales 652w, 808-9

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd—continued
Nursery schools, Local government expenditure 128w
Oral contraceptives, Prescription charges 731-2w
Postal services, Welsh language 574w
Public transport, Expenditure 288w
Railway stations, Handicapped 8-9w

Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill 1997/98
Questions
34w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air force (23.04.98) 1051-6
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Germany 2-3, 47w
Northern Ireland government 269w

Willetts, Mr David,
Questions
Educational finance, National insurance contributions 228w
Jobcentres, Repairs and maintenance 589-91w
Marginal tax rates 36-7w
Welfare to work 960

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill (HL), 2R (07.04.98) 163-4

Williams, Mr Alan W
Questions
Building regulations 16-7w
Exchange rates 951
Farmers, Bankruptcy 83w, 103w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Debates etc.
Territorial Army (08.04.98) 317-8
Questions
Defence procurement 8-9
EC grants and loans, Wales 654w
Export promotion 148-9
Public appointments, Wales 315w

Willis, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 838, 877-8, 905
Northern Ireland negotiations orders (22.04.98) 937
Questions
Business premises, Valuation 428w
Higher education, Conditions of employment 662w
Higher education, Finance 662w
Jobseeker's allowance, Mature students 661w
Mature students, Income support 659w
Mature students, Student grants 657-9w
Student grants, Married people 658w
Students, Social security benefits rules 685w
Tax allowances, Tuition fees 700-1w
Teacher training, Tuition fees 502w
Teacher Training Agency, Finance 595w
Teachers, Pay settlements 661w
Teachers' pensions 661-2w
Universities, Scotland 658w

Wills, Mr Michael
Questions
Employment agencies, Ex gratia payments 709w
Employment Rights Act 1996, Ex gratia payments 563w

***Wills, Mr Michael**—continued*
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen, 466w

Wilshire, Mr David
Questions
Ministers' domestic visits, Northern Ireland Office 431w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**, Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office*
Questions
Economic policy, Scotland 583w
Educational finance, Scotland 581w
Employment policy, Scotland 583-4w
Fish farming, Scotland 167-70w
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 581w
Higher education admission, Scotland 169-70w
Higher still development programme 457-8w
Local education authorities, Scotland 585w
Local enterprise companies, Scotland 458-60w
Lone parents, Day care of children 584w
New deal schemes, Scotland 586-7
Petrol, Scotland 582w
Physical education, Scotland 462w
Pre-school education, Finance 585w
Pupil exclusions, Scotland 461w
Railway transport, Cairngorms 110w, 720w
School closures, Scotland 107-8w, 583w
Scottish Development Agency, Environment protection 461w
Secondary education, Glasgow 588w
Student loans, Scotland 588w
Tourist boards, Scotland 586-7w
Vocational guidance, Scotland 587

Wiltshire
Secondary education (22.04.98) 941-8

Windfall tax
960

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 702
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 861, 883
Northern Ireland government (20.04.98) 493
Parliamentary broadcasting, Points of order (07.04.98) 158
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 22-4, 32
Questions
Business questions 976
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 462-3
House of Commons times of sittings 16
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 541w
Northern Ireland government 338-40
Palestinians 151-2
Unemployment, EC countries 956

Winter fuel payments
697w
Publicity 727-8w
Social security benefits overpayment 379-82w
Sunderland 641-2w
Take-up 379w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Maze Prison, Security 267-8w
Refugees, Abortion 412-3w, 634w
Refugees, Death 412w

***Winterton, Mrs Ann**—continued*
Refugees, Health aid 411-4w
Refugees, Maternal mortality 681-2w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (21.04.98) 712
Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill, Programme motion, 2R and rem stages (22.04.98) 925
Questions
Agricultural products, Prices 213w
Bilderberg Group 353w
Business questions 973-4
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 581w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 957-8
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Rural areas 149-50w
Newsprint, Recycling 353w
Packaging, Wastes 306w
Paper industry, Trade competitiveness 353-4w

Wise, Audrey
Questions
Benzodiazepines, Prescriptions 615w
Handicap benefits, Multiple sclerosis 537w
Health service staff 578w

Witnesses
559w

Women
Afghanistan 325-6w
Boxing 566w
Cervical cancer 505-6w
Cricket 471
Custodial treatment 530w
Northern Ireland 181w
Scottish Parliament 588-9
Smoking 370w

"Women Seen and Heard"
181w

Women's Royal Voluntary Service
Government grants 529-30w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Debates etc.
Finance (No 2) Bill, 2R (21.04.98) 637-40

Woolas, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Trade union recognition (06.04.98) 25, 53
Questions
Primary education, Finance 225w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Public access 249w

Work sharing
629w

Working conditions
Local government staff 302-3w

Working families tax credit
398w, 619w, 698w
Employment opportunities 35-6w
Owner occupied housing 41w

Working hours
626w
Fisheries 572w

"Working Together for a Healthier Scotland Consultation Paper"
575, 581w

World Cup
Tickets 818-20

World War II
Personal property 62-3w

***Worthington, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Accidents, Medical treatments 436w
Beef, Exports 337-8
Beef, Northern Ireland 338
Cellular phones, Radiation 433w
Children, Northern Ireland 269w
Day care of children, Northern Ireland 269w
Employment, Equal opportunities 268w, 335-6
Grammar schools, Northern Ireland 270w
Lawther Day Centre Belfast 433w
Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Executive, Millennium compliance 183w
Nurses, Northern Ireland 678w
Osteoporosis, Northern Ireland 436-8w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 433w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 336-7
Welfare to work, Northern Ireland 336

Wrexham
Railway stations 573w

Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust 691w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Debates etc.
A47 (21.04.98) 723-6

Wright, Dr Tony
Questions
Officer Training Corps 220w
Referendums, Northern Ireland 270w

Wyatt, Derek
Questions
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 418w

Xenotransplantation
123w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Energy policy, Environment protection (22.04.98) 745-8
Legal Aid Board (08.04.98) 326-8, 332
Questions
Council tax 613w
Non-domestic rates 612-3w
Standard spending assessments 613w

York
Army bases (22.04.98) 776-83

Young, Sir George,
Questions
Defence procurement 5-6
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 12-3

Young offender institutions
706w

Young offenders
21-3w
Administration of justice 533w
Community service orders 24w
New deal schemes 439-40w
Prison accommodation 23-4w
Prison population 512w
Prisoners on remand 512-3w, 705-6w
Secure accommodation 634-5w

Young people
Conditions of employment 361w
Ear disorders 369w
EC grants and loans 328w
Low pay 624-5w
Voting behaviour 531w

Youth employment
EC law 361w

Youth offending teams
24w, 171-2w

Youth organisations
EC grants and loans 202-3w

Youth unemployment
Aberdeen 586-7

Yugoslavia
Peace negotiations 146-7

Zimbabwe
Land ownership and tenure 410w

CAMBRIDGE REFERENCE LIBRARY